

**STRATEGIC STUDIES INSTITUTE  
US ARMY WAR COLLEGE  
CARLISLE BARRACKS, PENNSYLVANIA 17013**

**25 MAY 1979**

**ACN 77002**

**PRESS COVERAGE  
OF THE VIETNAM WAR:  
THE THIRD VIEW**



**DRAFT REPORT OF THE STUDY GROUP**

**DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT:**

**Approved for public  
release; distribution  
unlimited.**

**Reproduced From  
Best Available Copy**

This report is a substudy of a larger study effort entitled: "Strategic Lessons Learned in Vietnam" sponsored by Headquarters, Department of the Army, and being conducted under the aegis of the US Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute. This substudy and other independent works on the same subject will be considered in preparation of the final report. The views, opinions, and/or findings contained in this report are those of the author and should not be construed as an official Department of the Army position, policy, or decision, unless so designated by other official documentation.

**20010821 145**

STRATEGIC STUDIES INSTITUTE  
US ARMY WAR COLLEGE  
Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania

PRESS COVERAGE OF THE  
VIETNAM WAR: THE THIRD VIEW

Draft Report  
of the Study Group

25 May 1979

DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT:  
Approved for public  
release; distribution  
unlimited.

This report is a substudy of a larger study effort entitled: "Strategic Lessons Learned in Vietnam" sponsored by Headquarters, Department of the Army, and being conducted under the aegis of the US Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute. This substudy and other independent works on the same subject will be considered in preparation of the final report. The views, opinions, and/or findings contained in this report are those of the author and should not be construed as an official Department of the Army position, policy, or decision, unless so designated by other official documentation.

#### DISCLAIMER

This report is a substudy of a larger study effort entitled: "Strategic Lessons Learned in Vietnam" sponsored by Headquarters, Department of the Army, and being conducted under the aegis of the US Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute. This substudy and other independent works on the same subject will be considered in preparation of the final report. The views, opinions, and/or findings contained in this report are those of the author and should not be construed as an official Department of the Army position, policy, or decision, unless so designated by other official documentation.

## FOREWORD

The draft report was prepared by Mr. William V. Kennedy, US Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute. It is an individual research effort representing only the views of the author. It is not a statement of official opinion or position either of the Strategic Studies Institute or the Department of the Army.

This research report is one of several substudies that will constitute the basis for a US Army War College study, Strategic Lessons Learned in Vietnam. Comments will be taken into consideration by the authors of the final study report. Such communications should be addressed to: Study Manager, Strategic Lessons Learned in Vietnam, Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania 17013.



ANDREW C. REMSON, JR.  
Colonel, CE  
Director, Strategic Studies Institute

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF THE AUTHOR

William V. Kennedy is a graduate of Marquette University's College of Journalism. He has worked successively as a general assignment reporter on The Harrisburg (PA.) Evening News; as editor of The Mechanicsburg (PA.) Daily Local News; Public Relations Director of the Pennsylvania Department of Military Affairs, and as a free lance writer specializing in military affairs over a span of some 27 years, of which nine were in full-time free lance status. His published work includes some 300 articles in the professional military, commercial and religious press of the United States, United Kingdom, France, Ireland and the Republic of Korea. He has served successively as an enlisted man in the Regular Army, Air Force Enlisted Reserve and Air National Guard and as an officer in the US Air Force, Air National Guard, Army National Guard and US Army Reserve. He served for two years as an Army Public Affairs Officer in the National Guard Bureau, Departments of the Army and the Air Force, The Pentagon. He has served as special public relations counsel to the National Guard Association of the United States, and as adviser on national defense issues to the Pennsylvania Democratic State Committee. Since 1967, he has been employed as a member of the US Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute. He holds the rank of Colonel, Armor, US Army Reserve.

## NOTE

The term "press" is used here in preference to the vague and imprecise term "media"--properly "media of communications," including fiction, non-fiction and simple propaganda. The press is defined here as that part of the print and broadcast "media" that deals with the gathering, evaluation and dissemination of news. The rest of the "media" are more properly considered, along with the press, under the heading of psychological warfare.

The author is much indebted to Colonel Alfred J. Mock, USA, (Ret.) for the opportunity to participate in discussions with distinguished members of the press as part of Colonel Mock's US Army War College course, "The Media and the Military in a Free Society." These have included Peter Arnett of The Associated Press; Ken Bacon of The Wall Street Journal; Gloria Emerson, formerly of The New York Times; George Esper of The Associated Press; John Finney of The New York Times; Elmer Lower, of ABC News; Maynard Parker of Newsweek; Gary Shepherd of CBS News; Wallace H. Terry, formerly of Time, and William Wordham of ABC News.

Hanson W. Baldwin, the dean of American military journalists, has permitted the author to impose upon a professional association and personal friendship of many years standing in the form of frequent consultations, an extensive correspondence, and guidance through his personal papers at Yale and the excellent Baldwin interviews by the United States Naval Institute.

Keyes Beech, of The Los Angeles Times and formerly of The Chicago Daily News; Peter Braestrup, author of Big Story; Lee Lescaze of The Washington Post; Neil Sheehan, formerly of United Press International and The New York Times and Major General Winant Sidle, USA, (Ret.) generously assisted by participation in workshops and panel discussions and by reviewing a discussion draft. The author is particularly grateful for the comments Mr. Beech has provided at Appendix A.

Valuable assistance was provided by Colonel Gary Werner, formerly Information Officer, Military Assistance and Advisory Group, Saigon, 1962-63; Lieutenant Colonel Andrew P. O'Meara, Jr., and other former US Army advisers in assessing the complex events of the Diem crisis. Special thanks is due Colonel O'Meara for the statement on the Ap Bac engagement included as Appendix B.

The generous and most competent assistance of Ms. Patricia Bodak of the Archives Section, Sterling Library, Yale University; Ms. Carolyn Davis of The George Arents Research Library for Special Collections, Syracuse University, and Ms. Joan M. Hench of the US Army War College Library lightened this task by many hours. The author is much indebted, also, to the editorial assistance of Ms. Marianne Cowling, Strategic Studies Institute, and to Ms. Pauline M. Juba for her complete typing support.

The final product is the author's responsibility alone.

PRESS COVERAGE  
OF THE VIET NAM WAR:  
THE THIRD VIEW

How American journalism reported the war in Viet Nam from 1962 to 1975 is the subject of a bitter three-way dispute.

Keyes Beech who covered the war for the Chicago Daily News, describes the relationship that developed between the US Government and the press, as one of "mutual hatred." Beech says of himself that "I felt caught in the middle. On the one hand, I found myself in the awkward position of being on the side of the Establishment in that I believed in the objective if not the way we were going about achieving it. On the other, I was often disgusted with what I considered the boorish behavior of some members of the press corps, not to mention what I felt to be their irresponsibility."<sup>1</sup>

As Beech makes plain, the press itself was and continues to be deeply divided about how the war was reported. This view largely has been obscured by the "press" versus "government" polemics of the debate. Since there are many published sources on both sides of the "press" versus "government" debate, the emphasis in this research project has been on identifying the views of the third group--the "dissidents" within the press itself. By considering the views of all three groups an attempt is made to determine what can and should be done to avoid a reversion to "mutual hatred" in the future.

THE OPPOSING VIEWS

The point of view of the "government", in the form of its principal officials during the Viet Nam intervention, is well represented by General William C. Westmoreland, former US commander in Viet Nam. Westmoreland

quotes with approbation Australian journalist, Denis Warner's comment that "there are those who say it was the first war in history lost in the columns of The New York Times."<sup>2</sup>

The dominant view on The Times itself and generally of the principal or at least most influential American news executives was stated by James Reston as South Viet Nam was succumbing to the final Communist offensive:

The reporters began by defending the policy of American intervention, but reported facts that suggested it wouldn't work. Presidents Johnson and Nixon vilified them for challenging the official line that all was going well, and refusing to "get on the team," but in the end, the reporters came nearer to the truth in Vietnam than the officials.

There may be an important point here: It is no longer possible for a free country to fight even a limited war in a world of modern communications, with reporters and television cameras on the battlefield, against the feelings and wishes of the people.

Maybe the historians will agree that the reporters and the cameras were decisive in the end. They brought the issue of the war to the people, before the Congress or the courts, and forced the withdrawal of American power from Vietnam.

One result is that the reporters of the press and radio and television are now being blamed for the defeat of American policy and power in Indochina, which is another way of challenging the whole idea of democracy.<sup>3</sup>

In a less certain tone, William Small, then Director of CBS News in Washington, observed that, "When television covered its 'first war' in Vietnam, it showed a terrible truth of war in a manner new to mass audiences. A case can be made, and certainly should be examined, that this was cardinal to the disillusionment of Americans with this war, the cynicism of many young people towards America, and the destruction of Lyndon Johnson's tenure of office."<sup>4</sup>



Because the Viet Nam era was followed so closely by the even more acrimonious government-press relationship of the "Watergate" crisis, a belief has emerged among journalists and other observers that there is, necessarily, an "adversary" relationship between the press and government. In the Viet Nam context General Westmoreland traces the origins of this concept to the events leading to the overthrow and murder of South Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem in 1963. Several of the principal critics within the press concur with this assessment. Some place equal or greater emphasis on the coverage of the Tet Offensive of 1968.

#### THE HISTORICAL ROOTS

Press coverage of the Viet Nam war was, in part, the product of an historical process and, in part, the product of new technology of which television was the single most important element.

To understand the elements of the dispute over Viet Nam reporting it is first necessary to understand something of the historical process. Two excellent accounts of this process have been published in recent years by John Hohenberg and Phillip Knightley. The account that follows is based largely on their work.<sup>5</sup>

The "war correspondent" is a relative newcomer to the military scene. Until the middle of the 19th century what the public learned of military operations was largely ex post facto and largely the view of the surviving, and victorious, military participants. Julius Caesar's account of his campaigns in Gaul and the uses to which he put it are still the model of this sort of reporting.

The introduction of a relatively disinterested observer to report what was going on while it was going on had to await the development of a society

that recognized at least some role for the public in the conduct of war, other than the provision of money, supplies and replacements.

In the relatively short period between the end of the Napoleonic Wars (1815) and the outbreak of the Crimean War (1854) Britain shifted from a society in which public opinion counted for little or nothing to one in which government policy depended upon the support of a middle class of commoners. One result was the dispatch of William H. Russell of the London Times to the Crimea.

Told that Mr. Russell was seeking to accompany the Army command group into action, a senior staff member remarked, "I'd as soon see the devil."<sup>6</sup>

Russell's reporting of the appalling conditions under which the rank and file of the British Army lived, fought and died produced a public demand for reform. That reform, carried out in part by Florence Nightingale, is credited by Hohenberg with saving the Army in the Crimea from disaster, and he probably is right. It also resulted in relief of the commander and an upheaval in the entire military system, events that did not endear Russell and his successors to the military establishment either in Britain or elsewhere in Europe.

The spectacle that followed shortly thereafter in the American Civil War confirmed the worst of the military apprehensions. As described by Knightley, the correspondents who covered that conflict were driven by ". . . commercial pressures. . . such that a correspondent was far more likely to be sacked for sending no news at all than if he sent an interesting but completely fabricated story." The same pressures also drove correspondents to fire off every scrap of information they could get their hands on, making their papers valuable sources of intelligence for the opposite side.<sup>7</sup>

The military managers of World War I attempted to resolve the problem by excluding correspondents from the combat zone. The Germans initially followed a more open policy, but after their early successes bogged down they joined the British and French in a policy of exclusion. This meant that the publics on both sides were almost entirely dependent on the official communiques. Knightley argues that, had the civilian publics on both sides been aware of the extent of the horrors on the Western Front, the war might have ended in a negotiated settlement in 1917.

In any event, the tight "security" on the Allied side could not survive the introduction of American forces. The American military leadership was quite willing to go along with the British and French policy of exclusion, but pressure from the US Congress forced a more open policy. Gradually, the exclusion policy gave way to the field censorship approach whereby correspondents traveled freely on the condition they submit their copy to an Army censor before dispatch.

The exclusion policy had fathered an unprecedented use of propaganda as a weapon of psychological warfare, particularly by Britain. Since there were few other channels of information available to the public, the Allied governments and eventually the German as well were able both to hide the true cost of the war and to inflame public opinion by exaggerated and fictional tales of enemy atrocities.

The long-term price of these policies was very high. When the truth surfaced in the 1920's and 1930's disillusioned publics developed a mistrust of government that continues to the present. This was a principal factor in what former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger describes as a "loss of legitimacy" by the major European states.

The Axis powers of World War II practiced a combination of what can best be described as "guided exclusion" and propaganda. Correspondents were granted carefully guided tours of the combat zone so long as the forces there were winning. Thereafter it was total propaganda. The Allied powers started on about the same tack but that policy collapsed along with everything else in June 1940.

Except in the British-controlled areas, allied press policies during the latter phase of World War II were essentially American policies of unlimited press access subject to a more or less enlightened censorship. The fact that Pearl Harbor had united the American public and with them the press behind the war effort made for a generally satisfactory relationship. Such disputes as arose were over peripheral issues, such as the Patton slapping incident, or over matters of timing and procedure, such as the breaking of an embargo on the final European surrender story.

The US Government generally had the cooperation of the press in obscuring the extent of the damage done in the Pearl Harbor attack. The vivid personal reporting of Ernie Pyle gave the reading public a sense of identity with the fighting forces that no propagandist could have equalled. Indeed, the relationship was so close that commanders routinely discussed impending operations with correspondents.

"As long as all copy was submitted to censors before transmission," Drew Middleton of The New York Times wrote in a letter to Knightley, "people in the field, from generals down, felt free to discuss top secret material with reporters."<sup>8</sup>

There were even some tributes to the military censors. Knightley cites an incident during the Battle of the Bulge (December 1944) in which

"the German advance sent correspondents fleeing to Maastricht, where they tried to send their first stories. The censor quickly pulled them into line. What they had written, he said was 'sheer hysteria,' and he told his staff to use blue pencils freely. The correspondents were grateful. 'What could have been an unholy mess', Wes Gallagher of the Associated Press cabled to his office, 'was saved by the good sense of front line field press censors'."9

The World War II attitudes and methods of US press-government relations continued essentially unchanged through the Korean War and for basically the same reasons. The war began with an act of military aggression that was clearly understandable as such. At least during the decisive phase, 1950-52, there was no extensive domestic US dissent over war aims or the methods by which the war was being fought.

The bitter political disputes of the final phase of the Korean War, stemming from the nature of limited war and prolonged political negotiations, may have set the stage for what was to come in Viet Nam.

World War II and Korea had burst upon the American consciousness. Viet Nam seeped in.

The United States had provided military assistance to France's war against the Viet Nameese Communists. US Air Force transports had participated in re-supply of the beseiged French and colonial garrison at Dien Bien Phu. American involvement gradually increased after the Geneva settlement of 1954. At first this was primarily in the form of political and economic aid to the new Republic of (South) Viet Nam. The US press responded accordingly, covering Viet Nam as it did any of the other areas of the world where the United States was similarly involved. There were two forces

already at work, however, that were to make Viet Nam a special case.

First, as early as 1950, Hanson W. Baldwin of The New York Times had encountered a deep division of viewpoint among American officials in Saigon about the direction of American policy: "Ed Gullion who was a secretary of the Embassy differed fundamentally from Donald Heath, the then Ambassador, not only about what US policy should be in Vietnam, but about interpretation of factual data, i.e., how successful the French operations were. This split was duplicated in the US military mission and it continued--with intermissions--throughout the war in Vietnam."<sup>10</sup>

Second, the "limited war" literature that emerged, largely from civilian academic sources, during the latter 1950's persuaded key members of both US political parties that an "insurgency" such as that supposedly in progress in South Viet Nam could be controlled and overcome by minimal, entirely professional military forces without serious involvement of the civilian body politic. To a considerable extent, the US Army and Marine Corps supported this conception as a way of regaining roles and missions lost or underfunded during the "massive retaliation" days of the Eisenhower Administration.<sup>11</sup>

The character and substance of the three-way dispute that broke out over press coverage in Viet Nam emerged from the complexities of these two forces.

Essentially, the dispute is an argument over method--how the Government went about arriving at and achieving its objectives and how the press went about reporting the Government's activities. The evolution of policy within the Government is the subject of a separate research report. For the purposes of this report it is necessary to consider the basic

organizational approach by which the press sought to report and interpret events in Viet Nam or anywhere else.

#### HOW THE PRESS COVERS MILITARY AFFAIRS

The basic organizational concept of American print and broadcast journalism, developed in the late 19th century and continuing to the present day, is that of the "city desk." In its simplest form, this consists of a city editor who presides over a group of reporters educated largely in the liberal arts and trained to maintain an interest in the entire sweep of human activity. The city editor assigns these "general assignment reporters" based largely on who is available at the time. The reporter carries out his assignment and either returns to the office to write a story or, if time is pressing, telephones a report to the newsroom where another writer puts it into usable form. The "copy" thus produced then goes to a copy reader at the editor's desk--the "city desk"--who reads the story for clarity, syntax and accuracy and who writes a headline. The story then goes into the mechanical process of publication. It is supposed to be written so that the make-up editors can delete the final paragraphs to meet space requirements without destroying or distorting the essential information conveyed. A generally similar process occurs in broadcast journalism where the "news director" in various forms and under various titles performs the function of "city editor."

In practice, public demand for competence in areas of intense interest has forced the press to departmentalize. First and foremost among these in American journalism is the sports department, manned on even small newspapers by people who are often highly trained specialists in the manner in which the more popular games are played, the personnel of the teams

and the coaching staffs and who are expert in relating current sports to the history of those sports as recorded in a vast array of record books, biographies and clipping files. From the editors' and publishers' long experience with outraged public reaction, mistakes even in seeming trivialities often result in a sports writer's early departure or relegation to more simple tasks.

Close behind the sports department in terms of specialization is what was once called the "society" or "women's" page or section, now become under various titles a "lifestyle" page or section. The writers and editors trained in this field are expected to have a detailed knowledge of who is related to whom in the community and of the general social structure. They must become expert in description of clothing and accouterments for social gatherings ranging from weddings to fox hunts. As in the sports department, what might seem the most innocuous error in the spelling of a name or in the identification of the sponsors of a fund-raising event can result in departure or reprimand for the offending writer or copyreader.

It is of considerable importance to note that in both cases it is accuracy in what the layman would take as minutiae that determines the editors' assessment of a reporter's competence.

Specialization in the sports and women's sections is largely the result of public demand exerted by a variety of means ranging from letters to the editor and direct complaints at social gatherings to economic pressures in the form of cancelled subscriptions and advertising.

The editors themselves early recognized the need for specialization in some other areas, such as police, city hall politics and state house reporting. This is accomplished by assigning a selected reporter to a



"beat." In its most traditional form it is accepted that the police reporter will spend many hours playing checkers or more serious games of chance at the fire or police station so that when a fast-moving story "breaks" he will not be forced to waste time learning how the fire and police departments work, the layout of the city, the names of at least the key fire and police officials, their personal and family histories--for stories of heroism or tragedy--and how to go about getting a coherent, accurate and timely story out of a chaotic or dangerous situation.

Each such department or specialist adds to the overall cost of operation. Again in its simplest form, the sports writer who is delving through the records of the 1927 World Series is not as "productive" as the general assignment reporter who is sent to cover a livestock show in the morning, a Kiwanis Club speech at noon and a couple of ground breaking stories in the afternoon.

For a time in the 1930's and 1940's it appeared that specialization in the reporting and analysis of military affairs was coming to be accepted as a necessary feature of modern American print and broadcast journalism. S.L.A. Marshall of The Detroit News, George Fielding Eliot, syndicated by King Features, and Mark Watson of The Baltimore Sun emerged from distinguished military or journalistic service in World War I. Free-lancer Fletcher Pratt built a respected national reputation from a base in the professional military periodicals. A newer generation led by Hanson W. Baldwin on The New York Times, John G. Norris on The Washington Post, Lloyd Norman later of Newsweek and others seemed to presage a growing corps of newsmen familiar with basic military terminology, structure, methods, sources and able to place current military events in historical perspective.

All participated in some degree in the development of broadcast journalism and at least one, Eliot, became a regularly scheduled network commentator.

In theory, the emergence after 1948 of a large regular peacetime military establishment for the first time in US history would seem to have produced an increase in the number of journalists specializing in military affairs. What occurred was just the opposite. As the older generation of military specialists died or retired the expertise they had built up generally disappeared with them. In only a few instances were they replaced by reporters of comparable training, experience and interest. This decline in the numbers of trained specialists paralleled the decline of influence of the uniformed military services in the national defense decision-making process. The decline of both groups was in inverse proportion to the ascendancy of "defense intellectuals" in the civilian academic world. News executives may well have sensed this major shift from the pattern of the 1930's and 40's and reacted accordingly.

Both print and broadcast journalism depended and continue to depend largely on the "wire" services--the Associated Press, United Press International and to a lesser extent Reuters and other foreign agencies--for foreign news.

The basic organization of the wire services is the city or regional bureau, often staffed by only one full-time general assignment reporter or a part-time "stringer" who is paid on the basis of stories accepted for transmission. Since World War II, the two principal American wire services generally have maintained only one full-time military affairs specialist each, supplemented as traffic required by general assignment reporters. Each of these specialists has been assigned to the Pentagon

building where the reading of the daily output of press releases is itself a full-time task.

In the century and a quarter since W. H. Russell went out to cover the Crimean War there has emerged only one US journalist who could be considered fully proficient in the coverage of military affairs and who was provided by his employer with the resources to travel regularly throughout the United States and abroad without the pressure of deadlines and to publish virtually all that he learned. This was Baldwin of The Times.

Understanding the role of The Times in American journalism and government is crucial to understanding the development of any major national story. The Times provides the primary source of national (US) and international news for the academic community, key US Government officials and the press itself. Its influence among government officials and television news executives, producers and correspondents is particularly important. Although government officials have access to large amounts of information from intelligence agencies and other intra-governmental sources, most of it is so turgidly written, so fragmented, so burdened by security classification procedures, so slow in making its way through the bureaucratic system and so often in an almost illegible cable format that The Times and, to a lesser extent, The Washington Post provide more attractive and above all, more timely alternatives.

Somewhat the same pressures operate within the press itself. The wire services produce a massive amount of current news each day, but with little or no correlation. Only The Times, with some 550 editors and correspondents, truly covers the news, worldwide, on a relatively coherent

daily basis. Since the television networks have no comparable network of correspondents and almost no analysts, they are dependent on quality newspaper coverage to gain perspective. The Times is the primary source for this perspective at all levels in the networks, in part because it is the only print source most TV newsmen have the time or inclination to read. For similar reasons, The Times exercises extensive influence among the staffs of Time and Newsweek. There is a strong likelihood, therefore, that any long-running story eventually will be reported on television and in the news weeklies--and understood within the government--largely within the terms of reference established by New York Times coverage and interpretation.

Because of this key role not only in journalism but in American society as a whole, the internal politics and policies of The Times can have a profound effect on national policy. The experience of the then military editor-Baldwin--during the Viet Nam period provides an insight into why this is so.

Hanson W. Baldwin had come to The Times in 1929 after graduation from the US Naval Academy, active naval and merchant marine service and a stint as a general assignment and police reporter for The Baltimore Sun. At the time he was hired, The Times was being run by two men with a keen and increasing awareness of the need for competent military coverage. Julius Ochs Adler, the No. 2 man, had a distinguished record in World War I and remained active as a general in the Army Reserve. Possibly because of the Jewish background of The Times ownership, the No. 1 man, Arthur Hays Sulzberger, was as acutely aware as Adler of the tragedy unfolding in Hitler's Germany and of the portents for a renewed World War. Baldwin's responsibilities were expanded rapidly from general assignment reporter to "naval correspondent"

and subsequently military editor. Virtually unique among military journalists before or since, he was assigned a full-time research assistant, and during World War II this support was further expanded.

Baldwin was awarded a Pulitzer Prize for his World War II coverage. His books, magazine articles and radio and, later, television appearances in addition to his work at The Times gave him an international as well as national prominence in his field. He had the confidence of the US military Joint Chiefs of Staff individually and collectively to such an extent that any reference by Baldwin to "military sources" in a national story was generally recognized to mean that the information and views reported had come from one or more of the highest US military authorities. The Chiefs and other military sources routinely gave Baldwin documents marked "Secret" or otherwise "classified."

Baldwin operated from New York. His responsibilities were worldwide. Day-to-day news from the Pentagon building was covered by a member of the Washington Bureau. For a time this was the beat of the late Anthony Liviero, a reporter whose technical military background complemented Baldwin's. Liviero never was replaced by a reporter with comparable technical training and experience.

In 1960, on the eve of large-scale US military involvement in Viet Nam, the technical expertise available within American journalism to cover a war or any major military story was as follows:

- o There were a handful of military specialists on as many major newspapers—chiefly The New York Times, The Washington Post, The Washington Evening Star and The Detroit News. Almost all were over 50 and some were in their 60's and 70's.

o The broadcast networks had no correspondent or analyst trained or experienced in coverage of military affairs beyond the mechanics of routine Pentagon reporting.

o Of the mass circulation news weekly magazines, only Newsweek employed an experienced military specialist, and he was in Washington rather than New York where the principal decisions about copy-handling and analysis are made.

o The wire services military coverage expertise consisted of no more than two men each, both in the Pentagon. In each case only one was a specialist of long service on the military "beat" and all were essentially confined to the Pentagon building with occasional excursions largely in the artificial environment of official visits.

o Beyond the reporters and analysts regularly assigned to the military beat there were a small group of journalists who had acquired extensive knowledge of military fundamentals as a by-product of the wars of the mid-20th century and as a matter of personal interest and avocation. Among these were Keyes Beech, Asian correspondent for The Chicago Daily News; Marguerite Higgins, diplomatic columnist for The New York Herald-Tribune; and Jim G. Lucas of the Scripps-Howard newspapers.

o Of the journals of opinion, only one, America, employed the services of a regular military commentator.

o The economics and editorial attitudes of the free lance market were gradually driving out the few military specialists who attempted to follow the path of Fletcher Pratt.

## HOW THE PRESS COVERED THE WAR

In assigning reporters to cover the war in Viet Nam, the press followed the lead of the US Government, which saw the war as a peripheral rather than as a central focus of policy--to be handled by such as the US Army Special Forces ("Green Berets"), largely out of sight or hearing of the American public.

General T. R. Milton, US Air Force (Ret.), a member of General Maxwell Taylor's mission to Viet Nam in 1961 says that "The Green Berets were the New Frontier's answer to massive retaliation and its response to Khrushchev's threatened 'wars of national liberation.' Vietnam seemed a good place to test the theory. There were no clear-cut objectives--just go over there and straighten things out."

Thus, when military operations began to emerge as the primary aspect of US involvement in Viet Nam in 1961-62, the resident US press corps in the country consisted variously of from three to seven general assignment reporters, most of them very young, new to Asia and largely innocent of any formal training in military operations or history. Their job was to formulate a diplomatic and military estimate of the situation on which the American public could base its assessment of national policy and strategy.

The resources available to most of these reporters were extremely limited. An Army public affairs officer in Saigon at the time speaks of Neil Sheehan of United Press International "living on a pittance, operating out of a storefront where he had his bunk and a typewriter with a Viet Namese stringer in the backroom to watch things when Sheehan was away."

Except for the two-man Associated Press bureau, each of the correspondents was responsible for covering the entire country of 17,000,000 people. This could be done only by remaining in the capital, Saigon, with limited excursions based largely on advance notice, or on "tips" that something newsworthy had happened.

During this early period there were no resident television correspondents in Viet Nam. Events there were covered by the networks largely by reading wire service reports. For major stories TV news teams were dispatched from Tokyo or Hong Kong.

The first major clash between the Saigon US correspondents and the US Government came in 1962-63 over efforts by the Government to hide the extent of US military involvement. That the Government made such an effort and lied at least in small ways to hide the increasing involvement is now admitted by virtually all of the major participants.<sup>12</sup> Fearful of the domestic political consequences of a continuing military buildup--especially with the 1964 Presidential election approaching--official spokesmen tended to exaggerate success and to attempt to suppress stories of failure. This served only to drive the reporters to look all the harder for evidence of failure and to exaggerate that which they found.

The New York Times man in Saigon during this period was David Halberstam. Then 27 years of age, Halberstam had worked as a general assignment reporter in the United States and came to Viet Nam after 15 months covering the United Nations peacekeeping operation in the former Belgian Congo. He had no military training or experience. According to his book, Making of a Quagmire,\* his total acquaintance with military operations in the Congo had consisted of "one session with live machine guns and one visit to a field



hospital." He was sent direct from the Congo to Viet Nam. His preparation for the new job consisted of reading a book about Viet Nam on the airplane enroute and a meeting in Hong Kong with The Times man he replaced.

The split within the US Government over Viet Nam policy that Hanson W. Baldwin had encountered in 1950 was now more sharply defined. The French had been defeated. The new Republic of Viet Nam in the South was under increasing pressure from the Communist North. The senior officials of the American mission, Ambassador Frederick E. Nolting, Jr., and Army General Paul D. Harkins, sought to keep the war a Viet Nameese rather than an American effort. That supported the Kennedy Administration aim of keeping the war on an advisory basis at a relatively low level of US commitment.

An echelon or two below Nolting and Harkins were men who believed the United States must take over the war "lock, stock and barrel."<sup>13</sup> Among the most articulate and effective of these were John Mecklin, public affairs officer of the US Embassy, and Lt. Col. John Paul Vann of the Army, then adviser to the South Viet Nameese 7th Division in the Mekong Delta. Vann was destined to become one of the most vivid personalities of the war.

Standing in the way of total Americanization of the war was President Ngo Dinh Diem of South Viet Nam. Diem's credentials as an anti-colonial Viet Nameese patriot and nationalist were at least the equal of those held by his Communist foe, Ho Chi Minh in Hanoi. Diem was determined to maintain sovereignty at all costs and eventually was called upon to seal that determination with his life.

To the young American reporters in Saigon fell the task of trying to sort all this out in a way that would make sense to the American people and enable the American public to form a valid judgment about the future

course of US policy. More specifically, to these young reporters fell the task of trying to resolve for the country at large the split in American policy that Baldwin had encountered in 1950 and that was steadily worsening.

At least part of this task was the formulation of a valid independent judgment about the quality of the South Viet Nameese Army relative to their Communist opponents, the wisdom of the advisory policies being followed by the US military and the likelihood of those policies achieving the US national objectives. This called for trained military judgment of the highest order. Knowing full well that they lacked the necessary technical background to make such a judgment, the reporters looked around for a reliable source. They already had reason to distrust or at least dislike the senior American military leadership because of its efforts—at State Department behest—to deny them access to sources of information. Ready and willing to serve as sources were the "young turks" among the US military advisers, most prominent among them, Lt. Col. Vann.

While the reporters would argue later that there were other sources, Halberstam's book, Making of a Quagmire, always comes back to Vann. Neil Sheehan of UPI was sufficiently impressed by Vann to become his biographer.

Vann gained the confidence of Halbertstam of The Times, Sheehan of UPI and other reporters apparently by convincing them that he was an expert on guerrilla warfare. In fact, the US Army had no such experts of any rank, its last Asian campaign comparable to Viet Nam having been against Aguinaldo in the Philippines, 1899-1902.

Vann seems to have been convinced that the weaknesses of the South Viet Nameese Army were essentially the product of political interference

from the Diem regime. By drawing the reporters' attention to these weaknesses, Vann and other troop level advisers of like viewpoint were able to undercut the more optimistic reports of General Harkins and his staff.

So persuasive was Vann that his young admirers were soon trading military judgments with Vann's seniors.

"I remember a sharp argument between Sheehan and an American senior officer," Halberstam relates. "The latter cited the high rate of Vietcong casualties and claimed that this proved that the war was being won. Sheehan insisted, however--and most guerrilla war authorities supported him--that this was simply a sign that the war was being lost and that the Government was losing control of the war and the population. In a successful insurgency, he insisted, when you are doing well the casualties do not rise, they drop, and the war simply goes away."<sup>14</sup>

The "senior officer" was well aware by then that "most guerrilla war authorities" meant Vann, since Sheehan then had no military connections or experience beyond peacetime service as an enlisted finance clerk and information specialist in Korea and Japan.<sup>15</sup>

By calling in the Saigon--based newsmen on selected stories, Vann was able to wage an effective psychological offensive not only against his military and civilian seniors in the US mission, but the entire Diem regime as well. Most celebrated among these incidents was a brigade-size engagement at Ap Bac in January 1963.

In the circumstances related by Lt. Col. Andrew P. O'Meara, Jr., in Appendix B, Vann described the Ap Bac affair to Halberstam and other reporters as "proof" of the ineptitude of the South Viet Nameese Army and the hopelessness of the Diem regime. The Vann assessment went straight to

the US national leadership and to the most influential groups in American society via Halberstam's reporting in The Times. Since the wire services were reporting the same assessment--essentially from the same sources--the Halberstam reports went into print without challenge by the internal Times editorial staff ("gatekeepers" in the parlance of some current academic research.)

More than any other single incident, it was this reporting of the Ap Bac affair that opened up the breach described by General Westmoreland between the press and the US policy-makers in Viet Nam.

General Harkins, the US military chief in Viet Nam, and his staff took angry exception to the Vann (via Halberstam) version of the Ap Bac fight. The fact that they knew Halberstam, et al, had neither the training nor the resources to have arrived at the assessment reported and that they could be speaking only for a military opposition group served to enrage the senior military leadership. Their response was to claim that Ap Bac was a "victory." The reporters called that a lie.

As if this situation was not volatile enough, the reporters were also involved in an even more violent political dispute. This involved the effort by a group of militant Buddhist monks in Saigon to topple the Diem government by claiming that Diem and other Catholics in his regime were guilty of religious persecution. The principal vehicle for the political anti-Diem campaign was suicide by fire by individual Buddhist monks and nuns. In each case, the Saigon press corps was notified in advance of the time and place of the immolation. The result in each case was spectacular worldwide coverage.

The American newsmen, chiefly Halberstam and Sheehan, hammered hard

on the theme of a Catholic Diem disrupting the anti-Communist war effort by persecuting what the newsmen consistently reported to be the Buddhist "majority" of the population as represented by the militant Saigon monks.

In the rest of the world, if not in Viet Nam, the constant emphasis on Diem's religion--which was also the religion of some at least of the French colonialists--seemed to identify him with the colonial past and thereby obscured his anti-French, Viet Nameese nationalist background.

During the latter part of the campaign, anti-Diem US officials in Saigon and others in Washington were able to weaken US support for Diem and eventually to win President Kennedy to acquiescence in a military coup.<sup>16</sup>

Diem was deposed and murdered in November 1963.

"American reporters in Vietnam" Mecklin wrote, "achieved an influence in the making of US foreign policy that had been equaled in modern times only by the role of the New York newspapers in precipitating the Spanish-American War."<sup>17</sup>

It was the murder of President Diem and, to a lesser extent, the bitter criticism of the South Viet Nameese Army, that produced the split within the press itself.

An early indication of one of the issues on which the internal press battle lines would be drawn appears in a letter written from Copenhagen to Hanson W. Baldwin by Peter Braestrup in July 1963. A Marine veteran of the Korean War and a war correspondent during the Algerian War,\* Braestrup was the only other reporter then on The Times with a formal military education and a sustained interest in military affairs comparable

---

\*Since Braestrup has emerged as a storm center in the internal press

to Baldwin's. "As you know," Braestrup wrote, "David Halberstam, a friend of mine from Washington days, is immersed in the Saigon affair. He has had little experience with things military, yet his reporting has been good, even brilliant at times. But I think he could use a friendly letter--critique now and then (as we all can) on how he's doing. I suggest that if you find time, you might drop him a line. He'd really appreciate it."<sup>18</sup>

Setting a pattern that would persist to the present, the press critics within the press itself eventually included all of the specialists in military affairs and several of the principal diplomatic correspondents with experience in the Korean War, World War II, or both.

Leading the initial attack was Marguerite Higgins. Miss Higgins was born in Hong Kong. She had won a Pulitzer Prize for combat reporting in Korea and later served as Tokyo bureau chief for The New York Herald-Tribune.

---

dispute it is of significance to consider the personal credentials he brought to the task of assessing press coverage of the war. Braestrup was educated at Yale where he was a member of the Army Reserve Officer Training Corps. Later, he entered the Marine Corps and completed the Platoon Leader's Course. He was wounded in Korea on the night of November 8, 1952, while conducting a successful defense of Outpost "Reno," forward of Company E, 2d Battalion, 7th Marines, along the main line of resistance. After release to inactive duty he covered the French war in Algeria and the Viet Nam War on successive assignments for The New York Times and The Washington Post. At the invitation of the Marine Corps, he has served as an unpaid consultant to the Corps on the development of its history program.

She had visited Viet Nam on six occasions before the American phase of the war began and she traveled throughout the country during the period when the American anti-Diem party was coalescing.

In articles in the Herald-Tribune and later in a book and magazine articles,<sup>19</sup> Miss Higgins condemned the anti-Diem reporting. Her principal conclusions were these:

- o That the anti-Diem Buddhist campaign was politically rather than religiously motivated and confined to a small group of urban militants.

- o That the Buddhist campaign had no relevance to the concerns of the majority of the Viet Nameese population.

- o That the suicides by fire, and a celebrated demonstration in Hue, far from being the spontaneous actions of "persecuted" victims, were carefully planned and staged "media events" to exploit the appetite of the US press for sensational stories and pictures.

- o That, whatever the defects of the Diem regime, the likely replacements could only be worse.

- o That mistaken, sensationalistic reporting by inexperienced US newsmen was the decisive factor in bringing about US support for the overthrow of Diem.

- o That by becoming a party to the overthrow of Diem the US Government had turned a Viet Nameese war into an American war, making large-scale American intervention and casualties inevitable.

During the period prior to Diem's overthrow, Miss Higgins had challenged the unrelievedly pessimistic assessment of South Viet Nameese Army performance transmitted by Vann and like-minded advisers through their

press contacts. In this she was supported by reporters who accompanied the South Viet Nameese units more regularly than did the Saigon reporters, principally Keyes Beech of the Chicago Daily News and later Jim G. Lucas of the Scripps-Howard newspapers. Lucas had covered both World War II and the Korean War. Beech was a Marine combat correspondent in World War II. He covered the Korean War and was well along in a career as an Asian specialist.<sup>20</sup>

If Miss Higgins and the other dissenters from the Saigon press view were correct, the press, and through the press the US Government, had made a strategic error of grave proportions.

There is now substantial agreement that the Saigon Buddhists did not represent a majority of the population, Buddhist or otherwise.

The anti-Diem Buddhists went on opposing the governments that followed Diem, but with diminishing effectiveness. The suicides by fire continued, apparently to the present day. By 1977 the US press seemed to have concluded that, however horribly spectacular, the suicides had little or no political or religious significance.<sup>21</sup> As described by one TV newsman to Keyes Beech, the suicides had become a "tired act."

There is now a general consensus that the two years following the fall of Diem were a period of disaster. A Viet Nameese nationalist had been replaced by military officers who had begun their careers in the anti-revolutionary French colonial forces. There followed a period of political turmoil.

Each new military leadership replaced province and district chiefs. In the view of all observers then on the scene, the focus of the Army turned from the enemy to the political arena in Saigon.



President Nguyen Huu Tho of the Viet Cong "National Liberation Front" was quoted by Wilfred Burchett as follows: "[Diem's overthrow and resulting governmental turmoil] were gifts from heaven to us. Our enemy has been weakened from all points of view, military, political and administrative. The special shock troops which were an essential support of the regime have been eliminated. The military command has been turned upside down, weakened by purges. . . . The principal chiefs of security and the secret police, on which mainly depended the protection of the regime have been eliminated, purged. . . . Troops, officers and officials of the army and the administration are completely lost. They have no more confidence in their chiefs and have no idea to whom they should be loyal. Their morale has fallen to a new [low]."\*

By 1965 so much had been lost that the US Government decided only the introduction of major US troop units could turn the situation around. The heavy US casualties Miss Higgins had predicted followed inevitably.

The publication of the so-called "Pentagon Papers" in 1971 confirmed in detail the account Miss Higgins had published prior to her death in 1966, about the extent of US Government involvement in encouraging the initial military coup.

It is of considerable importance in view of later events to recognize that the anti-Diem efforts of Halberstam, Sheehan and the other American newsmen who shared their views were not aimed at American withdrawal from Viet Nam.

---

\*Quoted by Marguerite Higgins in column published by The Philadelphia Inquirer, April 5, 1965.

"What about withdrawal?," Halberstam asked in his book, The Making of a Quagmire (pp. 315, 319, 322). "Few Americans who have served in Vietnam can stomach this idea. It means that those Vietnamese who committed themselves fully to the United States will suffer the most under a Communist government. . .; it means a drab, lifeless and controlled society for a people who deserve better. Withdrawal also means the United States prestige will be lowered throughout the world. . . I believe that Vietnam is a legitimate part of [the US] global commitment. . . . The lesson to be learned from Vietnam is that we must get in earlier. . . ."

By September 1966, Sheehan had come to the conclusion that, "Slowly wearing down the enemy, it seems to me, is our only hope of somehow muddling through. . . . If we can break the back of the VC and the North Vietnamese main force units in the South, the intensity of the fighting will probably fall off. . . . It will probably be two or three more years before there is any evidence of real progress and we may even have to widen the war and physically occupy Southern Laos to bring the infiltration under control. . . . I think we are accomplishing something in Vietnam. . . We are beginning to employ our military power. . . effectively. Military power is all we really can apply in Vietnam, but we have so much of it that through its sheer weight we may be able to prevail in the end."<sup>22</sup>

In the four years since his argument with General Harkins' headquarters, recorded by Halberstam, Sheehan's estimate of what it took to win a "guerrilla war" had undergone a considerable change.

#### THE WAR WITHIN THE NEW YORK TIMES

Although Baldwin carried the title "military editor," he was not what

the title implies--the coordinator of Times military coverage. The Times was then and remains a collection of mutually jealous satrapies. Baldwin's influence over military coverage beyond his own two-man office lay in his personal prestige, his relationship with the various foreign and domestic news editors, the Washington and overseas bureaus and direct access to the top management. The Baldwin papers at Yale University show that he used this influence with circumspection.

During the crucial years, 1961-1963 when the eventual size and scope of the US military commitment were being determined, Baldwin's attention was focused increasingly on a bitter struggle with then Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara.

Beginning with the TFX (Tactical Fighter Experimental) controversy early in the Kennedy Administration, Baldwin had clashed repeatedly with McNamara and his public affairs assistant, Arthur Sylvester, over what Baldwin called "dissimulation, . . . doubletalk, . . . outright deception." These clashes would reach a peak in March 1966 when McNamara called a press conference to denounce Baldwin's coverage of Senate Preparedness Subcommittee investigations. These had been concerned with the effect of McNamara Viet Nam management decisions on the Army in Europe and the Tactical Air Command outside Southeast Asia. In a confrontation in McNamara's office, McNamara told Baldwin, "You are not fit to be a reporter," to which Baldwin replied, "And you, sir, are the worst Secretary of Defense this country has ever had."<sup>23</sup>

Strangely, the fact that Baldwin was attacking the Administration for the same moral deficiencies alleged by The Times men in Viet Nam hurt rather than helped Baldwin's position within The Times.

With the death of Julius Och Adler and the gradual retirement of Arthur Hays Sulzberger, The Times passed into the hands of men with considerably different attitudes toward the military and toward the relationship of The Times to the US Government.

Further, the management group that came into control of The Times early in the 1960's was strongly sympathetic to the management innovations introduced into the Department of Defense by Robert McNamara and his associates. This transition in The Times management was completed in 1963 with the accession of Arthur Ochs Sulzberger to full control. The sympathetic attitudes of the new business and management executives toward the McNamara regime in the Pentagon were reinforced by the strong political commitment of James Reston, then in a position of great influence within The Times, to the Kennedy Administration.

Baldwin found himself on the defensive in The Times almost from the time that he first began to criticize the McNamara regime in the Department of Defense. On 20 June 1962, Baldwin wrote to Orvill E. Dryfoos,\* "I am . . . especially unhappy," Baldwin wrote, "about the manner in which my interpretations and judgments in the military field have been cut, postponed and sometimes shelved altogether." The immediate issue was an editorial Baldwin had written citing the deterioration of McNamara's relations with Congress.

On 24 May 1963, Baldwin felt compelled to withdraw an article critical

---

\*Dryfoos, son-in-law of A. H. Sulzberger, was publisher from 1961 until his death in 1963. A. O. Sulzberger succeeded him.

of McNamara because then Sunday Times Editor Lester Markel seemed to "want a piece more sympathetic to McNamara than I can honestly give you."<sup>24</sup>

Although he wrote extensively about the policy aspects of Viet Nam during this period, Baldwin at first deferred to Halberstam, in Saigon, for day-to-day coverage of the war. Gradually, however, Baldwin began to be bothered by what he considered to be vague references to sources in Halberstam's work and lack of hard data to support the judgments expressed. On 16 December 1963, Baldwin expressed these concerns in a memorandum to Emmanuel Freedman, then Foreign Editor.

From that point on Baldwin was involved in an increasingly bitter three-way fight with elements of the Saigon press corps, the McNamara regime in the Pentagon and key members of The Times editorial hierarchy.

By 1964, Baldwin was in conflict with the editorial page director, John B. Oakes, over the content of The Times editorials on Viet Nam, although continuing to count Oakes as a good friend.<sup>25</sup>

Adolph Ochs, the founder of the modern Times, and Arthur Hays Sulzberger had followed a policy of avoiding strong advocacy in the editorial columns lest editorial policy influence how the news was reported. With the accession of Arthur Ochs Sulzberger to control the paper shifted to expression of strong editorial positions. The new publisher's main interest was in the business aspects of The Times. This resulted in the delegation of greater authority to the editors, such as Oakes, than they had been permitted under the elder Sulzberger. In Baldwin's view, the previous publishers' fears were realized as The Times reporting of the war came to reflect the increasingly critical editorial position.<sup>26</sup>

It had been traditional in time of war for The Times to publish a Christmas editorial saluting US troops overseas. By the mid-1960's, Baldwin's

attempts to get such an editorial published were being refused.<sup>27</sup> Gradually Baldwin was excluded from the editorial-writing process.

In 1965, Baldwin made a tour of the war zone and found there a Times reporter who he considered to be so emotionally anti-war and anti-military in general that his reporting could not be relied upon to express any but a predetermined ideological viewpoint. This was Robert Kleiman. Kleiman succeeded Baldwin as a principal author of The Times' editorials on military affairs.<sup>28</sup>

In The Reporter of February 1966, Baldwin "went public" with his criticism of the press in an article, "The Information War in Saigon." He cited "three major weaknesses": ". . . first and by far the most damaging. . . .--the lack of belief. . . in the government's word. The second is the failure of some of our officials in Viet Nam to present their case as honestly, as rapidly, and as effectively as they might have done. The third is the failure of some of the press, television and other media representatives in Viet Nam to provide a balanced and factual picture of the war. . . . some of the correspondents in Saigon simply are not capable of adequately reporting military operations. And some of the TV reporters have delivered generalized editorial judgments that they have neither the competence nor the knowledge to sustain."

By now, Baldwin was engaged in something of a guerrilla war with various sub-editors and the copy desk. Box 27 of the Baldwin papers at Yale contains originals of annotated copy showing cuts, stories killed and what Baldwin identified as mistakes introduced in the copyreading process.

"Few of the copy readers," Baldwin says, "had ever been reporters of any sort; few of them--with some shining exceptions--were really expert in any field. [This was] in strong contrast to the British system. In Britain the copy reader was a copy editor. . . . The point is that in Britain a copy editor who read copy on Africa had been there, served there, knew it intimately; understood what the correspondent was writing about. But in the U.S. (with the possible exception of the sports departments) there were few copy readers who had any special knowledge. Consequently, the so-called specialists and experts were read by in-experts, with often dire consequences."<sup>29</sup>

In December 1966, The Times began to publish a series from North Viet Nam by Harrison Salisbury. By then, Baldwin's position had deteriorated to the point where he had not been informed that Salisbury was in North Viet Nam almost until the articles began to appear.

The Salisbury articles, Baldwin wrote to Clifton Daniel, then managing editor, "seem to put Mr. Salisbury and The Times squarely on the side of North Vietnam . . . . the final paragraph . . . implies that we are deliberately and consistently bombing civilian targets. As you know, I have been foremost in criticizing what I considered to be the deception and untruths emanating from the Pentagon and elsewhere in Washington not only about the Vietnam war but about other subjects but I do not think it is fair or accurate to make judgments based on statistics from Communist sources and print them as gospel without some qualification. . . ."<sup>30</sup>

In response to a long list of similar criticisms of the Salisbury article by Baldwin, Daniel stated, "I agree with you that some of Harrison's

material has not been properly attributed. . . We have already asked him to be careful about this."

Baldwin's memorandum, Daniel said, "provides the basis for a very much needed story. I hope it can be couched in terms attributing it to the military and other Washington sources so that we will not give the appearance of presenting an argument between two members of our own staff."<sup>31</sup>

Because of his national and international reputation Baldwin's job was not in serious jeopardy and he maintained to the last access to the top management of The Times. Also, because of the high esteem in which he was held by the Ochs and Sulzberger families there were sources of strength for Baldwin beyond the immediate corporate structure.\*

That was not the case with William Beecher, Baldwin's designated successor. Beecher, then covering the Pentagon for The Times, was under attack by early 1967.<sup>32</sup> He left The Times shortly after Baldwin's retirement.

Peter Braestrup had left several years before, sensing a shift away from the management attitudes and philosophy that had made it possible for Baldwin to function effectively.<sup>33</sup>

From this sequence of events, it is apparent that by the time of the Tet Offensive in January-February 1968, Baldwin and Beecher were largely isolated and on the defensive in a New York Times that was by then vehemently against the Viet Nam War and which had taken a strong anti-military turn in general.

---

\*As evidence of this, Baldwin was asked by the family to deliver the eulogy for Julius Ochs Adler.



Ironically, the climax of this internal Times feud would be brought to light by Braestrup, whose journalistic meanderings led him from The Times to The Washington Post and, in reflection on two tours in Viet Nam, to authorship of a classic work on American journalism--Big Story, a study of press coverage of the 1968 Tet Offensive.

On 10 March 1968, The New York Times ran a story by Neil Sheehan and Hedrick Smith headlined, "Westmoreland Requests 206,000 More Men. . .". Braestrup says, "The story as developed [up to that point] seemed devastatingly simple: [Gen.] Westmoreland had requested. . . a 206,000-man troop increase to contain and roll back enemy gains at Tet, and escalate. . .". The two Times reporters then on the regular military "beat"--Hanson W. Baldwin and William Beecher "were not invited to join the search [for the full story]." In fact, says Braestrup, "The 206,000-man request for Vietnam, or any such major reinforcement, was no longer seen as a live issue by the Joint Chiefs by the time the Smith-Sheehan story appeared. . . [and] the 'request,' in any case was not Westmoreland's response to the post-Tet situation in Vietnam. . . . Beecher, at one point during that first week of March, ventured to warn his bureau colleagues not to take the troop request too literally."

The irony of it all, Major General Winant Sidle comments, "is that the 206,000-man request was for support of offensive operations, not a defensive reaction. Westmoreland was worried that he would not get a chance to defeat the enemy [i.e., by pursuit of a foe now known to have been decimated by the failure of the Tet and earlier attacks]."

As seen earlier, Beecher was already directly under attack within The Times, and Baldwin had been fighting off oblique attacks for years.

As printed, the 206,000 man-reinforcement story provided dramatic support for what was by then the virulently anti-Viet Nam war editorial stance of The Times. In the opinion of Braestrup and others, the story as published by The Times had a decisive effect on enabling those US Government officials who sought to withdraw from Viet Nam to gain the ascendancy within the Government.

"It had been a busy, productive month for The Times' Washington bureau," Braestrup comments. "The irony was, of course, that its 'biggest' story was the most misleading."<sup>34</sup>

The Times applied for and was awarded a Pulitzer Prize for David Halberstam's coverage of the Diem crisis. An application for award of a Pulitzer for the Salisbury series from North Viet Nam was denied.

Concerning the Pulitzers gained and denied, Thomas Griffith, "Newswatch" essayist for Time Magazine wrote, "With its clout at Columbia, the Times often presses for Pulitzers that will 'vindicate' its most controversial coverage--the Pentagon papers, say, or David Halberstam's Viet Nam reporting in 1964. This usually works, but Executive Editor Turner Catledge in 1967 sat with tears in his eyes as he learned that the other committee members had overturned Harrison Salisbury's nomination for a wartime journey to Hanoi. 'I was terribly upset,' Catledge wrote, convinced it was a decision on political rather than journalistic grounds."<sup>35</sup>

#### COVERAGE OF THE WAR 1965-75

The introduction of major US troop units into Viet Nam in 1965 began a new phase of government-press relations, and of the internal debate among journalists. Whereas the major events leading up to large-scale US intervention had been conveyed to the American and world publics largely by

print coverage, the final phase, 1965-1975, of the American involvement was dominated by television coverage.

Once major US forces were involved, each of the American networks deployed one or more camera teams to Viet Nam for continuous coverage. Lacking any specialized military news staff, it was impossible for any of the networks to deploy reporters with a technical knowledge of war. While there was strong competition among the networks themselves, there was a much more intense competition among the news teams within each network. This was so because only a small amount of the news footage "shot" on any one day would make the severely time-constrained news broadcasts. The future of each correspondent depended upon how much exposure he got on the air.

The apparent immediacy (in actuality much of the film appeared long after the event), the vividness and the huge audiences of television reporting had the effect of superheating an already tense military-press relationship. By the end of the first year of large-scale US troop involvement the three way battle over press coverage had resumed in more bitter terms than ever before.

The split within the press was along the same general lines discernible earlier. The small group of military affairs and Asian specialists was becoming increasingly vehement in their criticism of the work of younger general assignment journalists and, in particular, of the television newsmen.

A particularly bitter subject of argument on both sides was the method of operation of the television news teams. The controversy over this

issue extended beyond the usual critics within the press, as indicated by this comment from Dale Minor of the strongly liberal WBAI stations in New York:

"One staging incident I personally witnessed. . . occurred in February 1968, in Hue. . . I was at the rear headquarters of the First Battalion of the Fifth Marines. . . [A] television [correspondent] interviewed the young company commander of the unit in reserve, and then he asked if the officer would have a squad of his men move down the street (taken two days before) and go through the motion of clearing a house. . . . Now playing Hollywood Marines in their brief time out from a very real and deadly war, the squad moved about a block down the street to a vacant, half-gutted house while the television camera churned. There, for the sake of pictorial realism, they were asked to throw a smoke grenade into the house. One of them did and a plume of white smoke . . . rose into the air. Before they had a chance to walk back up the block, North Vietnamese mortar rounds, apparently aimed at the smoke plume, rained on the area, killing two Marines in the headquarters compound and killing and wounding several South Vietnam soldiers in the immediate vicinity."<sup>36</sup>

"Television reporters in Vietnam," Minor asserts, "are acutely aware that what their New York offices want, above all, are action stories. . . . They are not as a rule told this in so many words. They simply know from experience what is most likely to be used on the evening news program--and for a reporter whose professional reputation (and a portion of his income) is made by what is used. . . words are unnecessary. Mike Wallace said that during the time he was in Vietnam, some of the correspondents kept a kind of scorecard as to which pieces were used and were not used and why,

and it did seem as though an inordinate number of combat pieces were used compared with some first-rate pieces in the political area or the pacification area or nonbloody stories."<sup>37</sup>

An incident that was to produce deep animosity among the military and press people involved is related thus by Richard Wilson of The Baltimore Sun:

"CBS Evening News on October 9, 1967, reported an incident in which a soldier attempted to cut off the ear of a dead enemy soldier. Two CBS people, Don Webster and John Smith, were involved in reporting the incident. They were subpoenaed at the trial of Specialist 4 George A. Pawlasky, but neither appeared, both being absent from Vietnam at the time of the trial. Pawlasky was found guilty in the ear-cutting incident. At the request of the American Embassy, no further action was taken against Mr. Smith who was listed as a principal in the case for having supplied the knife for the ear cutting."<sup>38</sup>

In defense of his newsmen, CBS President Frank Stanton had stated in January 1966 that, "Unhappily, much of the news in any war is bad news. . . . As a result, the men who risk their lives to get the sounds and sights of the embattled, and the men who stay up all night to get the material ready for the air, are treated in many cases as if they invented the events and conditions they are reporting. . . . failures and mistakes are an essential part of the story."<sup>39</sup>

A month earlier, Richard Fryklund, military affairs specialist for the Washington Star, wrote that, "Television's day-to-day coverage of the war in Viet Nam-uncensored, biased and deeply emotional, is becoming a national problem. . . . the presence of a camera can 'create' news where none other-

wise would have existed. . . . The interviewed soldier who understates has no impact. He sells no soap. His little segment is dropped, and something with maximum drama is substituted. . . . The Viet Cong have a policy of deliberate torture and assassination. . . . But they don't permit uncensored television coverage, and their people don't have sets. Our side permits reporters and cameramen to go everywhere and record everything. . . ."<sup>40</sup>

Stanton's defense of CBS newsmen was matched by similar statements from other news executives, notably the wire service chiefs who controlled the great bulk of the news used day by day by both newspapers and broadcast news departments. In general, the prevailing view was that methods, personnel and organization left little to be desired. The critics generally were ignored or were dismissed out of hand.

In at least one instance, a television newsman could claim credit for a major contribution to the safety of American fighting men and indirectly to the overall Allied war effort. Bill Wordham, then of NBC News, encountered repeated reports of failures of the then newly issued US M-16 rifle. In two instances he saw evidence of what appeared to be Marine deaths due to this problem. Wordham and other reporters persisted in reporting the difficulties until they forced an official investigation. Their reports were confirmed and procedures instituted to overcome the technical deficiencies until the weapon could be modified. A similar incident had occurred during the Korean War when the reporting of Marguerite Higgins and other writers pushed the US Government into emergency production of an improved anti-tank rocket launcher to replace one that was inadequate.

By January 1968 there were 467 newsmen and women of varying nationalities in Viet Nam creating a major logistics problem for the military authorities. The American contingent had grown from three in the early 1960's to 179. This included 16 radio and television network reporters.<sup>41</sup> Of the total, Major General Winant Sidle and most of the major correspondents considered only 60 or so to be journalists in any truly professional sense. Aside from technicians such as television camera and sound crews, there was a considerable group of freebooters--as distinguished from genuine free-lancers who had made a living at the trade before Viet Nam, or who could survive writing about anything else. This situation was the product of the US Department of Defense accreditation policy, described thus by Knightley in The First Casualty: "The . . . accreditation system in Vietnam made it possible for anyone calling himself a free-lance journalist to get an MACV [Military Assistance Command, Viet Nam] card. All he needed were two letters from agencies or newspapers saying that they would be prepared to buy his material. The Associated Press, for one, would lend virtually anyone a camera, complete with film. . . . promise to pay a minimum of \$15.00 for any acceptable picture. . . . After that the correspondent was on his own. Transport was free [via US military aircraft], he could live on C rations, and in the field he was not likely to be charged for accommodations."<sup>42</sup>

Most of the newsmen in Viet Nam, genuine and otherwise, believed that the US Government was continuing to lie about the direction and relative success of the US effort in Vietnam. They had adopted the term "5 o'clock follies"\* for the daily government news briefing session in Saigon. More

---

\*Apparently, according to General Sidle, of military rather than journalistic origin.

and more they relied entirely on their own observations and on the views and reports of their colleagues. There was now outright hostility between the majority of the press corps and the government, if not always the individual spokesmen for the government.<sup>43</sup>

Among some newsmen at least, there had emerged the belief that the press is an entirely neutral element in society--that the interests of the United States, as such, are of no direct concern to the press. Individual newsmen came to regard themselves as "world journalists" responsible only to humanity at large and not to any particular country. In the extreme, therefore, it was of no concern to the journalist if a particular story resulted in damage to the security interests of the United States or its armed forces. In a less extreme form, editors and publishers of at least some major newspapers came to assert the right to determine without reference to the US Government whether the release of official documents is or is not in the public interest.<sup>44</sup>

The "world journalist" view, sometimes openly expressed,<sup>45</sup> more often implied by a willingness to exploit stories that seemed to encourage open mutiny, probably did more than anything else to turn military resentment into ill-concealed hatred for the press. The answer to many in the military seemed to be censorship.

Only once before in the 20th Century--for a short time in the opening phase of the Korean War--had American troops been committed to large-scale combat without censorship being imposed at least on the accompanying press.

Censorship was considered and rejected on several occasions during the time large American units were in Viet Nam. Perhaps remembering the



experience alluded to earlier during the Battle of the Bulge, Wes Gallagher, by then General Manager of the Associated Press, suggested that censorship be imposed.

The idea was rejected for several reasons:

- o The government of South Viet Nam continued to be sovereign. Had censorship been imposed it must have come under ultimate South Viet Nameese jurisdiction and that was bound to produce a worse row than anything that had occurred to date.

- o There was no way to stop the dispatch of newscopy and film from Hong Kong, Singapore, Tokyo or other neutral or quasi-neutral points.

- o The imposition of US censorship on foreign press representatives would increase the already difficult diplomatic relationships of the war. Some of those foreign nationals, for example, Francois Sully of Newsweek, Peter Arnett of the Associated Press and Morley Safer of CBS News, were working for US news agencies.

- o The legacy of the bitter government vs. press squabbles that already had occurred would have led to immediate charges that the US Government was "at it again."<sup>46</sup>

Early in the 1960's, there had been a lame attempt to exclude newsmen from American military installations and transportation--usually the only transportation available--but this collapsed under a wave of criticism. Based on recommendations by US Army Colonel Roger W. Bankson, then chief of Viet Nam press relations in the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs, the Honolulu Conference of March 1965 literally opened up the war to the press. Newsmen who served in Viet Nam since that time acknowledge that they had virtually unlimited access to the places and people they wished to visit or contact.

Whatever else it may have accomplished, unlimited access to the war did nothing to reduce the three-way press vs. government, government vs. press and press vs. press feuds.

S.L.A. Marshall, military editor of The Detroit News, had joined the fray in an article, "Press Failure in Vietnam" published in The New Leader on 10 October 1966.

Based on a trip to Vietnam, Marshall charged that "the overwhelming majority of correspondents do not get to the front. . . there is a cynical faddishness to war reporting out of Vietnam that contrasts diametrically with every prior performance. . . Today's average correspondent prefers a piece that will make people on the home front squirm and agonize. Never before. . . has there been so much concentration on the off-beat yarn to the exclusion of a balanced accounting of how. . . operations are being conducted."

Of the television crews, Marshall wrote, "as a group they are quite ready to cope with battle risks off and on. . . Their trouble is they want blood on the moon every night. It has to be a picture of a stricken field or of some poor wounded man mumbling unintelligibly as he is littered to the waiting chopper."

Of the civilian casualty stories--a major stimulus for the domestic US anti-war movement--Marshall wrote, "Hapless civilians have been killed in every war fought by the United States, but only in Viet Nam where they are far less common than in France during the [Normandy] invasion or in Korea, do they command first-page treatment every time."

The Tet Offensive of January-February 1968 is acknowledged by all sides in the controversy to have been of decisive importance both as related to the US involvement and to the final outcome of the war. This

rare agreement probably derives from the fact that the Tet battle, or series of battles, was followed almost immediately by President Lyndon Johnson's announcement that he would not seek reelection.

That decision was followed very quickly by the ascendancy of an anti-war group within the Administration and a rapid deterioration in Congressional support for the war effort based on the belief that Tet had "proved" the hopelessness of the situation.

"It was very apparent in Saigon," General Sidle recalls, "that [the Government in Washington] panicked. We sent all sorts of cables telling them it was all over in four days. But they wouldn't believe us."

A charge that the bureaucrats, Congress and the public had been misled about Tet by inept print and broadcast reporting first emerged in connection with publication in 1971 of a book (Tet!) by Don Oberdorfer of The Washington Post.

". . . the combination of high drama and low national understanding," Oberdorfer wrote, "created a monumental challenge in Vietnam--and the press, like the government, was ill-equipped to meet it. Newsmen sensed that something in the official Vietnam picture was terribly wrong but were unable to put a finger on just what. Without a broad mosaic of knowledge, individual actions and attitudes often seemed to make little sense. Convinced that officials had been lying about conditions and prospects in the war zone, unable to trust the information gathered by the government or the judgments expressed by it, unrestrained by censorship and goaded by competition, much of the press leaped to stark conclusions when sudden events in the previously untouched cities seemed to prove its theories right. The electronics revolution, which took the battlefield into the American

living room via satellite, increased the power and velocity of fragments of experience, with no increase in the power or velocity of reasoned judgment. Instant analysis was often faulty analysis. This was particularly so in the case of editors and commentators at home, many of whom were in touch with the political situation in the United States more than the military situation in the war zone."<sup>47</sup>

From the Oberdorfer book and from a review of that book by S. L. A. Marshall, columnist Roscoe Drummond concluded, "The American government was telling the truth [about the military implications of the Tet Offensive]. The military was telling the truth. But the American people were not getting the truth because TV and the press were not reporting the true picture."<sup>48</sup>

Drummond's conclusion is supported by the study of Tet coverage published by Peter Braestrup (Big Story) in 1977.

Braestrup's book is a meticulous analysis of Associated Press, United Press International, Time, Newsweek, New York Times, Washington Post and television coverage of the Tet Offensive, beginning in November 1967 and carrying into the domestic US political repercussions in March 1968.

Braestrup's analysis led him to conclude that, in general, the press had misinformed the US and world public about the meaning of every major aspect of the North Viet Nameese and Viet Cong offensive, in particular the following:

- o The 19-man attack on the US Embassy in Saigon ("The immediate result was gross exaggeration of what really happened at the embassy: a small but bold raid to seize the chancery that miscarried. . . .")

- o The seige of Khe Sanh. (Only one newsman seemed to have gotten the story straight: "S. L. A. Marshall . . . cited contradictions between low

casualty totals at Khe Sanh and wire service descriptions of enemy fire as 'murderous;' mocked the (Times) map showing 'three or four solid North Vietnamese divisions perched on the hills just outside Khe Sanh'; and derided another (AP) story for saying 'all resupply' is by airdrop. Marshall observed that 'every correspondent on the spot appears to be haunted by Dienbienphu . . . so persistently somber is the mood, so persistent the tone, that the poor devils composing the condemned garrison have little or no chance to come smiling through.'" Newsweek published a cover photo labeled "Agony at Khe Sanh" and announced its opposition to the US policy in Viet Nam while enemy forces, decimated by US firepower, were beginning their withdrawal from the scene.

- o Performance of the South Viet Nameese armed forces. ("The overwhelming journalistic fact about the South Viet Nameese performance at Tet was that it was rarely reported firsthand. Moreover, the few firsthand reports there were, received little prominence in the United States. This 'dimout' contrasted with the attention given to South Vietnamese flaws in second-hand Tet commentary and analysis from Saigon, New York, and Washington. . .") .

- o Effect on the Pacification program. Braestrup records a series of judgments by CBS News: "No matter how fast they [the pacification workers] get back to their posts now, much of the damage has been done. . . ." [It is] "likely" that US officials are asking for more troops "to help get the Vietnam pacification program back on the road," Robert Schakne, 28 February 1968; ". . . it seems likely that today Ambassador Komer asked President Johnson for more American troops so that we can permanently occupy the hamlets and fulfill the promise of security to their residents. . .", Walter Cronkite, 28 February 1968; "Pacification

has stopped," Marvin Kalb, 28 February 1968; "We lost control of the countryside," Schakne, 5 March 1968. First hand reports available to CBS on the status of the pacification program were as follows: A CBS interview with an agricultural adviser at Ben Tre; the rewrite, in Washington, by a Washington Post copyreader of wire service reports to state that, "Reports indicated that the pacification program . . . was a shambles." (Neither the AP nor the UPI reports made such an assertion); a guarded report by Lee Lescaze in The Washington Post warning that "it does not follow automatically that the Vietcong took control of remote hamlets as they took temporary control of parts of many cities"; a New York Times reporter's claim that "no part of the country is secure," based on his observation of the 19-man attack on the American embassy; another Times reporter's account of the situation in a province (Binh Dinh) that had always been heavily oriented toward the Viet Cong; some other fragmentary reports and statements by officials in charge of the pacification program, none of which support the CBS judgments. As it turned out, Braestrup states, Lescaze's caveat proved more reliable. "The Vietcong, striking for the cities, disrupted pacification but did not attempt a wholesale occupation of the hamlets. . . . It took not years' but seven months (encompassing two weaker enemy offensives) to bring the [pacification] figures back to pre-Tet levels . . . . in 1970 the [Washington Post's] bureau chief, Peter Jay, could drive unescorted in daylight 450 miles from Saigon to Da Nang."

Braestrup regards The New York Times "206,000-man reinforcement story," cited earlier, as a decisive element in turning around a key group of US

Government civilian officials--including the Secretary of Defense--to an advocacy of US withdrawal, or from covert to overt advocacy of such a policy.

In general, Braestrup concluded, "Rarely has contemporary crisis journalism turned out, in retrospect, to have veered so widely from reality. . . . The special circumstances of Tet impacted to a rare degree on modern American journalism's special susceptibilities and limitations. This. . . overwhelmed reporters, commentators, and their superiors. . . And it could happen again."

The Braestrup book was published in May 1977. Peter Arnett of The Associated Press registered "shock and surprise"<sup>49</sup> at the extent to which the book has been accepted by those who would seem to be the most offended. Except for Arnett's, none of the reviews published as of June 1978, including those of The Washington Post and The New York Times, challenged to any substantial degree the author's findings. The Times reviewer, however, took a leap into what seems best described as "psychic journalism" by stating that although the press seemed to have gotten all its facts wrong, it succeeded in divining the "truth" about the war.

"The big. . . mistakes," Richard Reeves wrote in Esquire, "we let history clean up. Which is why I would recommend. . . Big Story. . . to anyone seriously interested in the function and functioning of the press in late-twentieth-century America. . . . The suppression of mistakes and the scarcity of literature like Big Story are part of the reason that Americans, including recent Presidents and Vice-Presidents, routinely misunderstand public events in our media-bombarded time."<sup>50</sup>

In May 1978, Braestrup's research for Big Story was cited by the Society of Professional Journalists (Sigma Delta Chi) for distinguished service in journalism.<sup>51</sup> He has been invited to discuss his Big Story findings at the John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University; the Massachusetts Institute of Technology; the University of Maryland and before the Research Committee of the American Newspaper Publishers' Association.

#### COROLLARY STUDIES

Although not written by journalists, two studies corollary to Braestrup's work tended to support his findings, at least as concerns television news. These efforts were Edward Jay Epstein's News from Nowhere, and Ernest W. Lefever's TV and National Defense: An Analysis of CBS News, 1972-1973.

Epstein spent the year 1968-69 in the news offices of NBC with extensions into the other networks. His findings included the following:

- o The New York Times exerts a powerful influence on the content and viewpoint of television news because it is the one newspaper read thoroughly by the key news decision-makers in the industry.

- o "Network news . . . is forced by the cumbersome business of setting up cameras and shuttling camera crews between stories to seek out the expected event--that is one announced sufficiently in advance for a film crew and equipment to be dispatched to the scene."

- o ". . . rather than maintaining 'beats' where correspondents stay in contact with the same set of news makers over an extended period of time, network news coverage is ad hoc. Correspondents are shunted from story to story depending on their availability, logistical convenience and producer's



preferences . . . . Often a correspondent may be assigned to five different cities in a single week. . . . Network executives also tend to prefer generalists on the grounds that they are less likely 'to become involved in a story to the point of advocacy' as one NBC vice-president suggested."

o ". . . on the same night he suggested to the public that news was not produced or created," NBC's [David] Brinkley reported:

A vastly popular song through most of the summer and fall is called, "Ruby, Don't Take Your Love to Town." It's been high on the best-seller list, sung by Kenny Rogers and the First Edition. But it is more than a pop song; it is a social documentary, a comment on our times, and on the war [emphasis added]. It is the lament of a Vietnam veteran, returned home gravely wounded, confined to his bed, lying there listening as his wife goes out at night, leaving him because the war has left him unable to move. Well, what the song says, and its wide popularity in this country, may tell more about the ordinary American's view of the Vietnam war than all the Gallup polls combined, and here is the song, set to film.

"A three-minute film followed, supposedly illustrating the song, and showing what purported to be the room of the crippled veteran, complete with mementos, trophies, photographs and his wife 'Ruby's' belongings. Interspersed with scenes of the room were scenes of the Vietnam war--flamethrowers, helicopters, tanks, casualties--and of Presidents Johnson and Nixon, all combined into a single montage. The veteran's wife can be heard leaving, the door slams, and the film ends with a funeral."

"The song, although identified as a 'social documentary' on the Vietnam war, was actually written in 1942 and does not refer to that war--a fact which the executive producer of the Huntley-Brinkley program himself subsequently apprised me of. Nor was it on the best-seller songs at the time of the broadcast. The re-creation of the popular song was, in fact, entirely fictive. The 'veteran's room' was a set in Los Angeles, rented for the occasion. All the decor and war souvenirs were props which were selected, the field producer explained to me, 'to create an atmosphere of futility and absurdity.' The few seconds of battle scenes, intercut into the story 'to show what the veteran was thinking as his wife left him,' were carefully culled from ten years of stock footage in NBC and other film libraries, according to the producer. The editing suggested a definite connection between the Vietnam war and the crippled veteran. And, of course, the song itself was fictitious."\*

o "As an NBC News vice-president explained, 'It's not a Vietnamese war, it's an American war in Asia, and that's the only story the American audience is interested in.'"

o ". . . in its documentary on 'The Selling of the Pentagon,' CBS criticized the Department of Defense for staging the landings of South Vietnamese river patrols for conveniently placed cameramen (since it was known that there were no enemy troops in the vicinity). Yet a former Saigon bureau chief pointed out that 'it is considered standard operating procedure for troops to fire their weapons for the benefit of cameramen. . . .'"

o "No matter how this inoperative is achieved," according to Reuven Frank [then President of NBC News] "ideally network news subjects should be microcosms of national problems."

---

\*Edward J. Epstein, News From Nowhere: Television and the News, Random House, Inc., reprinted with permission. Copyright 1973.

It was this search for "microcosms," Braestrup found, that led television newsmen to profound judgments based on a single interview interwoven with wire service copy. In fairness to the television journalists, it was a weakness for just such microcosms that led to the exaggerated reporting and interpretations by wire service and print journalists of the Buddhist suicides in 1962-63.

The network predilection for expected events, cited by Epstein, explains something of the networks' near obsession, recounted by Braestrup, with what they seemed to be sure was another Dien Bien Phu at Khe Sanh. In all the confused events of the Tet era, that seems to have been the one out of which the "generalists" thought they could make some sense, while the expected but never realized demise of the Marine and South Viet Nameese garrison provided something for which the producers could plan.

Most controversial of the several studies to date has been the Lefever study of CBS News.

Lefever dealt mainly with the nightly "CBS Evening News," at the time the lead news program among all the networks in terms of mass audience. In general, Lefever concluded that there was a clear bias against US policy in Viet Nam and against those who believed that the United States is endangered by a Soviet military buildup.

As did Braestrup in regard to CBS coverage of the Tet offensive, Lefever found that CBS News had made a number of major judgments based on what it had learned, first-hand, from its own handful of general assignment reporters and second-hand from reading newspapers and wire service copy. Among these judgments were the following:

o "It has been generally recognized that the stumbling block to any peace agreement is South Vietnamese President Thieu" (Walter Cronkite, 10 Oct 72).

o "[The program, "Selling of the Pentagon," was] the exposing of a great propaganda organization that has been developed not primarily to inform the public, but to keep it sold on a big military establishment." (Walter Cronkite).

As a corollary to Hanson Baldwin's belief that strong editorials can influence news reporting, Lefever came to believe that Mr. Cronkite's public expression of strong personal opinion on these issues might have influenced how his subordinates reported and commented on the news:

"The 16 CBS reporters and correspondents who expressed their own direct views on Vietnam overwhelmingly criticized the Administration and advocated significantly reduced US military involvement." The bias went beyond Vietnam, Lefever claims, extending to a bias against any strengthening of US armed forces or to acknowledgment of the scope of the Soviet buildup.

Lefever's description of the process by which Mr. Cronkite and his staff arrive at judgments such as those quoted is strikingly similar to Epstein's findings.: ". . . most [TV] producers showed a great deal of concern about the reaction of certain select audiences--network executives, affiliate managers. . . , peers in the news division, and their own circle of friends."

The Lefever study provoked a reply from CBS on 23 December 1974. The principal points of this rebuttal were:

o CBS Evening News accounts "for less than one-fifth of CBS News broadcasts." Views in support of the US effort in Viet Nam and of concern about the Soviet military buildup were expressed by commentators on programs not covered by the study.

o Reliance by the study on "the index and abstracts provided by Vanderbilt University's Television News Archive" led to an omission in at least one important Cronkite quotation (not one of those cited above).

o The categorization of views expressed by CBS reporters and correspondents was too rigid.

While "CBS Evening News" may be one-fifth of the total news time scheduled, it clearly had an audience far beyond that proportion.

A letter from CBS President Richard S. Salant accompanying the CBS release revealed that Lefever had requested full transcripts of the news broadcasts and had been refused.

The CBS release and two Salant letters indicated that CBS had requested "the full data underlying [the study's] statistical computations, findings and conclusions." American journalism, including CBS News, has opposed providing any such data regarding its own internal operations and has fought such requests successfully in the courts.

In an interview with Betty Utterback of the Gannett News Service subsequent to the Lefever-CBS clash, Mr. Cronkite stated, "There are always groups in Washington expressing views of alarm over the state of our defenses. We don't carry those stories. The story is that there are those who want to cut defense spending."

## ANALYSIS

The scope and the intensity of criticism of press performance--by critics within the press itself and in closely related fields--has tended to increase rather than diminish since the fall of Saigon in 1975. This is in contrast to earlier wars of this century, when criticism of the press tended to be most intense during the conflict, but with press performance tending to look better as more information became available following the end of the war.

Implicit in the James Reston quotation cited at the beginning of this study ("another way of challenging the whole idea of democracy") is the belief that the majority of the American public came to desire "the defeat of American policy and power in Indo-China," that they arrived at this wish by watching television and reading the newspapers and news magazines, and that they made known their views through the press.

Information made available by journalists or through research conducted largely by journalists has brought this thesis into question on two counts:

First, analysis of public opinion polls and related events makes it increasingly doubtful that "the reporters" about whose work Reston wrote in fact represented, much less spoke for, a majority of the American public.

Second, the accuracy of what the majority or at least the most influential part of the press reported about two of the most crucial periods of the war--the Diem episode and the 1968 Tet Offensive--is becoming more questionable as more information becomes available.

As concerns public opinion, an analysis by Burns W. Roper in

Braestrup's Big Story<sup>52</sup> indicates that the majority of the US public would have supported strong US reaction in response to the 1968 Tet Offensive, rather than the decreasing US effort urged by the anti-war groups.

Loss of public support, Roper and Braestrup concluded, resulted from Presidential inaction during the period following Tet, followed closely by the President's decision not to run for another term.

Most surprising of all, it appears now that what the press generally interpreted to be an "anti-war vote" in the 1968 New Hampshire Presidential primary was in fact, just the opposite. This results from an analysis of post-general election polls that indicate the anti-Johnson Democratic vote in the New Hampshire primary went to Governor George Wallace in the general election. In short, Braestrup concludes, the vote for Senator Eugene McCarthy in New Hampshire was largely a protest against President Lyndon Johnson's management of the war, rather than against US prosecution of the war to a successful conclusion.<sup>53</sup> If that is the case, the press misinformed the public about the nature of the domestic US political impact of Tet, as well as about the nature of the offensive itself.

Even so, Roper concludes, "A comparison of the poll findings with Peter Braestrup's analysis. . . suggests that while the Tet Offensive, as perceived via media coverage, had noticeable effects on the American public at large, it had greater effects on the nation's 'leadership segment.' The press, politicians, and official Washington, through mutually reinforcing alarms, (emphasis added), seem to have been more excited about the specific import of Tet than was the general public."

This tends to confirm an observation by Marguerite Higgins that one of the failings of American journalism is a tendency "to mistake articulation for representation." In short, there is reason to doubt the validity of Reston's view that the anti-war sentiments of the press, and particularly his own newspaper, accurately expressed the will of a democratic majority. On the contrary, it appears that the key decisions of this phase of the war were made by an intellectual oligarchy without effective participation by the majority and in contradiction to the majority will.

More disturbing, at least to this writer,--because it strikes so close to the nerve center of the democratic concept itself--is the part played by the American press in the events leading up to the overthrow and murder of President Ngo Dinh Diem and his replacement by a military junta.

The decision to give tacit US Government support to the anti-Diem coup belonged to the President himself, not to the press. The decision of the newly arriving US Ambassador to Saigon to meet with the dissident Buddhists before he called on the President--an affront of incredible dimension, especially in an Asian society--was that of the Ambassador, Henry Cabot Lodge, not of the press. It can be further argued that the advice on which these actions were taken came from State Department officials, Averill Harriman and Roger Hilsman. Theirs, however, was not the only advice reaching the President. David Halberstam reached the President every morning on Page 1 of The New York Times. In total, Halberstam probably had a longer period of time with the President on these subjects than any single military or civilian adviser within the



Government. This, coupled with the influence of The Times reports and editorials on the echelons of policy-makers and policy-influencers around the President, constitutes the true "power of the press."

As was the case within The Times, the reports of the wire service men in Saigon served to "confirm" The Times coverage. The idea that all of them might have been wrong, and wrong-headed seems to have occurred only to a few--principally Marguerite Higgins.

Miss Higgins' analysis of the anti-Diem political opposition as being confined essentially to an unrepresentative band of politically ambitious monks and an inherently negative, essentially alienated French-educated urban "elite" has been borne out by subsequent events. To her question, "Who is your candidate?" Halberstam and the anti-Diem wire service reporters proposed the Army. That was also the institution to whom the anti-Diem party within the civilian agencies of the US Government looked, at least for the interim, since nothing else was possible. This was a strange way to achieve the sort of parliamentary democracy the reporters were seeking.

What of the quality of the South Viet Nameese Army? Halberstam, Sheehan, et al, acknowledged then and continue to acknowledge that they had no technical basis on which to make this assessment, so they depended on Vann and like-minded military advisers. What was not reported then, and came to light only much later with the publication of the first Halberstam book and the Mecklin book, is that the Vann argument was for an American takeover of the war and a massive American involvement. That issue was not clearly presented to the American public by the reporters who spoke for the Vann group of advisers, but it was correctly

identified by Marguerite Higgins as the inevitable outcome of their work.

The reporting of the Ap Bac affair was a key element in bringing down Diem. How valid was the Vann assessment that the battle was a disaster, or the counterargument by General Harkins' headquarters that it was a success? What basis did the reporters have for deciding that Vann was right and Harkins wrong, and not only wrong but a deceiver as well?

There is one common denominator by which the present writer can attempt to answer those questions. Ap Bac was a "combined arms" operation. That is, it involved the synchronization of various types of land and air units and weapons systems. This is accomplished by an intricate communications system consisting of radios, telephones, flares and other visual signals.

To participate effectively in combined arms operations of the type described by Halberstam in his book, Making of a Quagmire, the US Army prescribes a long "cycle" of training starting at the "basic individual" level, proceeding to an "advanced individual" level wherein the soldier learns a specific skill then to a "basic unit" program in which individuals and teams are combined into platoons and companies and thence to "advanced unit" training followed by brigade and division-level maneuvers wherein battalions and larger units develop combined arms teamwork in conjunction with Air Force and other service units as required. US Army officers and senior NCO's are not given responsibility for direction of such operations until they have some 15-20 years of service. The South Viet Nameese officers and NCO's who led the units involved at Ap Bac

had emerged during the previous 10 years largely from a French colonial army established in 1950 as a belated effort to identify the Viet Nameese population with their country's future.

The South Viet Nameese force at Ap Bac was not an "organic" brigade. That is, it was not a permanent organization accustomed to training and working together. It was a temporary melange of units put together for the Ap Bac operation.

This writer did not serve in Viet Nam, but he has helped to conduct battalion, brigade and divisional training in the American Guard and Reserve forces. From this point of view, the most striking aspect of the Halberstam (Vann) account of what happened at Ap Bac is that it is exactly what this writer would expect of any US Guard or Reserve organic brigade if it were to be committed to action with no more experience in combined arms training and operations than that ad hoc Viet Nameese unit had at Ap Bac. Yet those American units are led by men, mostly college graduates, who have been raised in a technological society, who are often successful in technological civilian occupations, and many of whom have attended a succession of courses of instruction in the same US Army service school system that trains Regular officers. At least as important, the American Guard and Reserve enlisted men are equally at home in the technological maze that makes modern combined arms operations possible. The officers and men of the South Viet Nameese Army enjoyed none of these advantages. In a Western context most of them were essentially 15th century farmers. Experience with the Korean Army had shown that it would take 20 years of

peace and massive foreign advice and support for an Asian army, starting from a comparable base, to mature into a reasonably modern fighting force.

Yet, American Guard and Reserve brigades and smaller organizations regularly make the same mistakes in coordination, timing, etc., that the South Viet Nameese made at Ap Bac (see Appendix B). They do so simply because the coordination of disparate moving entities of men and materiel is one of the most difficult activities in which humans can engage under ideal peacetime training conditions, let alone under the distraction of enemy fire.

Vann's frame of reference for judging the South Viet Nameese was that of a Regular US Army Officer. It would have been impossible for him to have gained the American Guard and Reserve perspective for it was not until 1966 that those American units were able to begin genuine advanced unit training. Vann's standards, therefore, could only have been those of an American Regular Army that had achieved in the previous decade one of the highest levels of peacetime professional proficiency in its history.

From the standpoint of military technology, it would have been all but impossible for any unit, South Viet Nameese, American or whatever to do much better than the ARVN did at Ap Bac given their state of individual and unit training. The question that remains is, who advised the South Viet Nameese to take on an operation of the complexity O'Meara describes in Appendix B, and Halberstam in the book, when failure for purely technical reasons was predictable if not certain?

More directly relevant to the Halberstam (Vann) claims that the Diem regime had demoralized the Army is O'Meara's account in Appendix B

of how the 50 South Viet Nameese armored personnel carrier machinegunners died. At least the last 10 or 15 of those men must have known with certainty that they would be killed. Yet, they stood to their guns with safety only a foot away, inside the hatches of the carriers. That is not the work of demoralized and dispirited men.

As concerns the attitude of the ARVN soldier to Diem himself, O'Meara says that when the unit he was advising was ordered to Saigon to participate in the coup, the enlisted men were told they were being sent to protect Diem.

"When they learned that, instead, they had helped to murder him the soldiers wept."

The one American military group in Viet Nam who had experienced the development of an Army starting from near zero were General Harkins and the senior staff officers in his headquarters. They had, by and large, been part of the World War II US Army that was developed from an aggregation of under-organized Regular and National Guard units to the huge force deployed by 1945. Their view of what could be done at any one stage of this cycle was bound to be different from Vann's but was it necessarily a lie? The claim that Ap Bac was something of a victory was certainly an exaggeration, but an understandable emotional response to being continually short-circuited by Vann and his confreres.

How could a seriously flawed assessment of South Viet Nameese performance been transmitted direct from the impressionable, technologically innocent minds of a handful of young reporters to the President and his advisers essentially without challenge or a more balanced analysis by

any intervening journalistic, let alone military authority? The answer to that seems to be that, however poorly qualified the reporters may have been in a regional and technical sense, the supposedly supervisory echelons in their organizations were even less qualified. Only on The Times was there any possibility of competent intermediate supervision, in the person of Hanson Baldwin, but the internal editorial arrangements and Baldwin's entanglement in the fight with the McNamara regime made effective supervision of the Saigon operation impossible.

How was it, then, that even without supervision, Marguerite Higgins was able to get the entire story, get it straight and get it into print in time for the President and his advisors to have been warned from what proved to be a disastrous course of action?

The fact that Miss Higgins knew war, and knew Asia and Asian armies surely had something to do with what is beginning to look more and more like a steller performance. The corroboration of her assessment of the South Viet Nameese Army by Keyes Beech--the only other reporter on more or less permanent assignment to the war with a comparable background--certainly is more than coincidental.

In short, the failure of New York Times and wire service reporting during the Diem crisis was a failure, not of individual reporters, but of a system.

That is fundamentally the same conclusion that Braestrup reached about Tet coverage in Big Story and it is substantially supported by Oberdorfer's earlier Tet!

## CONCLUSIONS

### The Influence of the Press On The Outcome of the Viet Nam War

Two of the crucial periods of the war--perhaps the most crucial, were the Diem crisis and the Tet Offensive. It was the Diem crisis that converted a Viet Nameese war irrevocably into an American war, and it was the reaction of key US policy-makers to the 1968 Tet Offensive that ultimately dictated the defeat of the American effort.

With Tet, as with the Diem episode, the press did not make the decisions but the press largely created the context in which those decisions were made and to this degree shares responsibility for the decisions.

### The Role of Television

Almost all parties to the dispute over Viet Nam press coverage believe that television reporting was the most important journalistic aspect of the war. The facts as seen by this writer bring to mind an exchange in the British film, "Darling," in which as the affair is winding down the mistress says, "But you've got to admit that your relationship with me was the most important part of your life." To which her now disenchanted lover replies, "It was certainly the most dramatic."

Television had relatively little to do with the impact of the Diem episode on American policy. The press influence during that period was almost wholly that of The New York Times, with the wire services as sort of a Greek chorus.

Television had a major emotional impact throughout the war, but the polls, as analyzed by Roper and Braestrup, show that never, even during the worst of the Tet reporting, did television news seriously threaten the maintenance of an effective majority for the successful conduct of the war. This despite deliberate propaganda masquerading as news, such as the phoney NBC News anti-war song sequence described by Epstein.

It may well have been television that panicked the small group of decisionmakers whose actions precipitated the American withdrawal. That, at least, is the opinion of Braestrup, Oberdorfer and others. In reference to the public at large, however, it can be concluded that television coverage was dramatic, but it was largely irrelevant. The majority of the American public seems to have made a discerning judgment that war is indeed hell and that the horrors they saw on their home sets were no worse than those of any other war. The existence within the population of a large number of veterans who have witnessed war on a larger scale of violence than was shown in the television reporting from Viet Nam probably had a balancing effect that helps to explain the relatively small impact of television reporting on public opinion toward the war.

The Times, notably in the Salisbury reporting from North Viet Nam and the mis-reported 206,000-man reinforcement story, continued to dominate and in a sense to guide the way in which the war was reported from beginning to end, by television--at least NBC and CBS, as well as by other parts of the press. Thus, the internal structure, and management attitudes within The Times continue to be of major importance in the development of US domestic and foreign policy.



## The Public Affairs Officer

Although cited often by themselves, (at various times, the present writer included), by other government officials and members of the working press as a key element of government--press relations, little attention is paid to the government public relations officer in the disputes discussed here. No major instance is cited in the studies considered in which the matter at issue was attributable to the work of a government press officer, functioning as such,\* or influenced in any major degree by such officers. This is irrespective of the fact that some public affairs officials were liked by the press, and others despised.

Early in the US phase of the war, the principal daily US press briefing became known among US newsmen as the "5 O'Clock Follies." The quality of the briefing officers ranged from poor to excellent with no discernible effect on improving press-government relations in the latter case and in the former case providing nothing more than embellishments on the central themes of press criticism.

In short, nothing the best of the public affairs officers could do could "sell" what the majority of the press had decided was a bad or at least a suspect policy. The worst of the lot made a bad situation worse, but only by an insignificant margin.

## FUTURE PROSPECTS

The fundamental problem exposed here is precisely that which Braestrup has concluded in regard to the Tet Offensive--the press was "overwhelmed"

---

\*Mecklin's influence during the Diem crisis was that of an embassy official. His talents and training as a newsman were of importance only indirectly, in that they made him a more effective communicator than the average bureaucrat.

by the complexities of the war and unless some drastic changes are made it is likely to happen again.

#### CORRECTIVES

Actions available to the Government to prevent a repetition of the unacceptable press relations situation that occurred in Viet Nam are limited. Generally they are:

- 1) Imposition of censorship.
- 2) Limitations on accreditation.
- 3) Improved quality of briefings.

#### Censorship?

The tight control of the press by the Israelis during their several wars since 1948 is sometimes cited as a model for future American policy. It is easy to overlook the fact that Israel has acted alone, never as part of a coalition except in a rather remote sense in 1956. Yet, even so, it has begun to experience what the larger history of the past century indicates to be the inevitable consequence of wartime censorship--a growing public mistrust of government.<sup>54</sup> Even in a war in which the United States acted alone, satellite photography and other technological developments make it questionable whether censorship would or could achieve the goal desired by its advocates, i.e., total control of the information reaching the public.

In a major war in Europe or Asia the United States will almost certainly be operating as part of a coalition. Differences of national policy, access by neutrals and multiplicity of communications again make it questionable whether censorship can be made to work under any conditions.

Further, the erosion of public confidence in government as the result of Viet Nam, Watergate and a host of scandals involving officials at every level make it questionable whether it would be wise to impose censorship, even if it could be made to work, and thereby engender further mistrust at a time when the faith of the American people in the war effort might be the margin of national survival.

#### Accreditation

The "accreditation" of journalists is the process by which a government permits correspondents to visit or accompany its forces in a theater of war. The imposition of any qualitative standard comes dangerously close to licensing—a mortal threat to a free press. Mainly for this reason, the US Government has been reluctant to establish restrictive qualitative standards.

Observers on all sides of the Viet Nam press controversies have commented on the abuses of the accreditation policies then in force: Anti-war ideologues were able to pass themselves off as journalists by obtaining the necessary two letters of sponsorship from publications of solely propagandistic nature; the working press was constantly embarrassed by marginally or non-effective free-lancers who had no, or at least inadequate financial support from their "sponsors" and were thereby reduced to begging lodging and meals from military organizations around the country; the near desperate economic situation of many of the accredited writers and photographers drove them to exploiting the worst sort of sensationalism to gain a market for their wares; the loose accreditation procedures made "journalists" out of people whose main purpose was to exploit the hedonistic possibilities of a war zone society—drugs, prostitution, cheap liquor and cheap living.<sup>55</sup>

Some reasonable method needs to be found to identify the bona fide journalist at least from the worst elements that identified themselves with the press in Viet Nam. Judgments about the relative quality of sponsors can lead only into a hopeless swamp. Ready at hand, however, is a simple economic measure that will effectively sort out the dilettante from the serious journalist: Require that the sponsor deposit in advance the funds necessary to support a correspondent during his expected tour in the war zone at least at the going American Newspaper Guild rate for a journeyman (five years experience) wire service reporter, plus expenses at the going wire service rate. Free-lancers would be required to negotiate in advance for pro-rata guarantees by their respective sponsors.

Allied to the question of accreditation is a question of whether foreign nationals should be employed by US news agencies to cover US military operations or other sensitive national defense matters. Three of the most controversial reporters of the Viet Nam era were aliens: Peter Arnett (Associated Press); Francois Sully (Newsweek); Morley Safer (CBS News).

Most US newsmen reject the "world journalist" idea. The vast majority have no difficulty recognizing that their future as free men and women is bound up with the future of the United States and its institutions—including its armed forces—and that they have a personal identity with and allegiance to the American forces. It is difficult to see how a non-citizen can hold that point of view. It seems reasonable to recommend, therefore, that accreditation in the future be limited to US citizens with reciprocal

agreements to Allied nations if their forces are actively engaged in the hostilities. This would open the way for reestablishment of the good working relationship that prevailed in World War II. If US commanders could be assured that the representatives of at least the American news agencies will be US citizens subject to the espionage laws, the commanders would be free to discuss future operations with the American reporters to the benefit of everyone concerned.

The "ground rules" developed to safeguard current and planned military operations in Viet Nam as in previous wars were adjudged by General Sidle to have been successful. Those used in Viet Nam are at Appendix C.

#### The Briefings

Improvement in the overall quality of Government press officers and their briefings, while always a desirable objective, is the least likely to effect a major improvement of wartime government-press relations. It is simply impossible to compress into a few hours, or even into a few days or weeks worth of briefings the technical information necessary for a reporter to understand and to make a valid independent judgment about the events he or she witnesses in a war zone. If the reporter does not have that sort of background upon arrival in the war zone it will require literally years to develop it, and when operations are as artificially constrained as was the case in Viet Nam the knowledge gained could be largely misleading about the nature of operations anywhere else.

It was the inability to make a valid independent judgment that made Halberstam and the wire service reporters the foils of Lt. Col. Vann and other sincere, passionate but inexperienced military advisers during the

Diem period. It was the ability of Higgins, Beech, Baldwin, Marshall and others to make such judgments--by no means always uniform--that distinguished their work.

#### Toward A Better-Informed Press

All of the information needed to develop the technical background needed for more timely, more comprehensive and more accurate coverage of military affairs is available to the press, much of it well organized and digestible to the serious student in the form of correspondence courses from the US Army Command and General Staff College and its Naval and Air Force equivalents. There is a wealth of information available through careful, regular reading of such military periodicals as Army, Air Force, The Marine Corps Gazette, The United States Naval Institute Proceedings, National Defense, etc. The peacetime exercises conducted by all the services and the Joint Chiefs of Staff are open, generally in their totality, to press coverage. In addition, such exercises provide the means to get to know service members the reporter could encounter again in wartime. Had any considerable number of the reporters who covered the Viet Nam War routinely covered major peacetime exercises the largely pointless controversy over the "5 O'Clock Follies" never would have arisen. In short, even in the peacetime exercises it would have been apparent that the reports of the briefing officer in a press center lagged many hours behind events in the field and were inevitably distorted by the process of being passed through many hands. The notion that the war could be covered via the Saigon press briefing was, in itself, evidence of the technical inadequacies of the majority of the reporters sent to cover the war.

To make sense at all of current military events it is essential to maintain a continuing interest in military history. To a considerable extent it was a lack of this frame of reference--and, indeed, an openly expressed contempt for it--that led to the panic induced by the press within parts of the US Government as a result of the "mutually reinforcing alarms" during the 1968 Tet Offensive. The whole episode resembles nothing so much as the panic of Stephen Crane's young soldiers in The Red Badge of Courage.

There is no lack of journalists with the degree of interest in military affairs necessary to generate the sort of inquiry described. Over the past 30 years, however, it has been virtually impossible for reporters with such a bent to find a place in American journalism. As a result, they have drifted away into other fields.

#### A Model for Successful Coverage

The model for successful coverage is that created at The Times by Julius Ochs Adler and Arthur Hays Sulzberger, except that the military editor should be a coordinator of military coverage as well as a correspondent and analyst in his own right. A key element of Hanson W. Baldwin's success was his full-time research assistant. That support freed him from routine tasks and assured comprehensive and methodical assemblage of current data while Baldwin was engaged in more specific tasks.

The fact that no other newspaper has risen to the national and international stature of The New York Times is a tribute to The Times, but, also, a major weakness in that if The Times fails--as it did in the Diem episode, the Salisbury reporting from Hanoi and the 206,000-man reinforcement story--there is a strong likelihood that all of American journalism will fail.

Correction of the problems that turned Government-press relations in Viet Nam into "mutual hatred" can be seen, therefore, to exceed any actions available to the Government and to depend almost wholly on a willingness by the press to review and to restructure its internal organization and its approach to the training of its practitioners.

As a minimum, it is essential that the quality of military coverage by The Times be restored to that existing during the tenure of Baldwin as military editor and Anthony Liviero as Pentagon correspondent. This implies a toning down of the editorial page, reconfirming it to the original Ochs concept of a commentator on the news rather than a shaper of the news.

The Times model is equally applicable to the broadcast networks and the major news magazines, i.e., an editor-analyst in New York, supported by a full-time research assistant, and a Pentagon correspondent who has a comprehensive understanding of military affairs outside Washington.

One of the arguments against such specialists has been that they tend to identify with the people and institutions they cover and to develop a biased viewpoint. There is no question that Baldwin had a strong orientation toward the Navy throughout his career, but that did not prevent his achieving balanced and competent coverage of the Army and the Air Force, nor, as the clash with McNamara showed, did it prevent him from criticism of high defense officials long before the rest of the press joined in that criticism. The notion that general assignment reporters, untrained in any field but the mechanics of sentence structure, are somehow more free from bias than the specialist scarcely is supported by the messianic record of David Halberstam, Gloria Emerson and other reporters in Viet Nam.



Hopefully, at some point one or more of the major regional newspapers elsewhere in the United States will develop into a national and international newspaper on a par with The Times. The Washington Post approaches that status to a degree, but it is still primarily a local newspaper focused on Washington society. Other likely candidates are The Milwaukee Journal, The Chicago Tribune, The Detroit News, The Denver Post, The Arizona Republic, and The Los Angeles Times. All could maintain a full-time military writer in their present form. Few of them do.

The practice of the wire services in maintaining one reporter each, full-time, on the military beat while the national defense budget climbed from \$30 billion to \$120 billion is one of the curiosities of modern American life. It led directly to the disastrous wire service reporting of the Diem episode and to the inadequacies and misassessments of the Tet Offensive reporting.

It is here, in fact, that the major restructuring of American journalism may be necessary. The regional or local "bureau" that seeks to cover all of modern life from nothing more than a shared acquaintance with Shakespeare and Emerson may no longer be adequate to the task. Medicine, business and finance, and transportation, among other fields, have as much a demand for specialized training as the military beat. Leaving local reporting to local newspapers and broadcast stations while reorganizing existing wire service personnel and resources into functionally oriented bureaus--military affairs among them--at home and regionally oriented bureaus abroad offers one way out of the present dilemma. The Higgins coverage and its confirmation by subsequent events indicates that had wire service bureaus staffed by journalists of training

equivalent to Miss Higgins' been operating in the region it is doubtful that the ghastly publicity stunts of the Saigon Buddhists would have been so misreported and misinterpreted. Had trained military affairs reporters and analysts been available within the wire service structure for deployment to Viet Nam--without closing down Pentagon coverage--it is doubtful that they could have been made into so effective a trumpet for one point of view--that of the sincere but politically naive anti-Diem advisers.

#### The Chorus Swells

The diversity of the forces in American society demanding increased competence in news reporting and analysis was apparent at a press symposium held during a Mid-Atlantic Region meeting of the Association for Asian Studies at Princeton University on October 30, 1977.

Dr. John A. Lent and Ms. Shanti Rao of Temple University presented a content analysis of Asian coverage that catalogued many of the same inadequacies that representatives of the armed forces and business have been complaining about for years--essentially shallow reporting and lack of timely, accurate interpretation.

In defense of the press, Maynard Parker of Newsweek said, "We are generalists, not specialists." He said that the cost of stationing an American correspondent in Tokyo now is between \$125,000 and \$150,000 per year.

Lee Lescaze of The Washington Post observed that coverage of specialized areas is in direct response to public demand.

To emphasize that television news is, in fact, current, Steve Bell of ABC News stated that he had just talked with ABC's man in Hong Kong and

that "you should know the future emphasis in China is going to be on technical efficiency and quality education rather than Maoist rhetoric."

To many of the Asian scholars in the crowded room, Mr. Bell's report was a striking confirmation of criticisms they had been voicing throughout the discussion period. On the previous day, a round table discussion on "China after Mao" had presented in great detail what Mr. Bell was reporting as "news." In short, ABC's "generalist" in Hong Kong was operating some six months behind the news available to Asian specialists in the United States. In fairness to ABC, the resources devoted to coverage of Asia by NBC and CBS would not have permitted their "generalists" to have done any better.

#### Cost

"The only way the press will change," Lescaze said in the context of the Asian studies discussion, "is through economic pressure."

If that is so, what would it cost the press to provide the minimal specialized military affairs coverage described earlier?

Considering the large salaries regularly paid by the television networks to news personalities, cost would be no major obstacle. At salaries of \$50,000 per year for a network military news director, \$25,000 for a research assistant and \$30,000 for a Pentagon correspondent and travel expenses of \$10,000 or less per year, the total cost per network would be under \$125,000 per year. A substantial part of that already is budgeted for the Pentagon correspondent. In all, it would be about a tenth of the salary paid to one star news performer. That is not intended to begrudge the reporter concerned her salary, only to point out that

with money like that to spend the network's neglect of what is easily the No. 1 story of the age is inexcusable.

Costs to major newspapers would be somewhat less, but still only a fraction of what is now spent on the sports department.

As indicated earlier, the major initial impact is likely to be on the wire services where a restructuring to provide more adequate military news coverage would almost surely trigger demands for a total overhaul to provide comparable coverage in other specialized fields.

#### The Role of the Public

The public can make its wishes known in many ways. Letters to the editor citing specific errors are particularly effective when dealing with newspapers and periodicals. The networks are virtually impervious to such correction, but local news directors are not. Continuous complaints, citing specific inadequacies and errors to local outlets eventually will force the networks to abandon the antiquated "city desk" approach in favor of a system more in keeping with their level of technological development. Criticism before groups, and resolutions by groups are, of course, even more effective since they begin to become "news" in their own right and thereby gain access to the news columns and at least local broadcast news programs. The most effective weapon of all, of course, is direct economic pressure based on cancellation of subscriptions and complaints direct to sponsors of network news broadcasts. There should be no embarrassment in the use of such pressures. They are an exercise of the individual's right of free speech and they threaten no one else's rights. Freedom of the press is freedom for those who can compete successfully for public favor. It contains no guarantees for those the public no longer wishes to support.

## How Much Bias?

Most difficult to assess is the degree to which bias affects coverage of national defense news and the degree to which the public or an offended part of the public can counteract such bias.

Braestrup argues in Big Story that bias was not a factor in the growing opposition by the dominant group within the press toward the Viet Nam War. Baldwin says there was an anti-military bias, as such, within The New York Times and that this gradually distorted news coverage of the war. The evidence supports Baldwin.

For a long period of time before the commitment of US forces to Viet Nam there were subjects that the most influential parts of the US press simply would not discuss. In the personal experience of the present writer both Harper's magazine and Foreign Affairs magazine--two of the most influential journals in the country--have refused to publish articles that conflicted with the editors' preconceptions of national defense policy. While serving as military commentator for America magazine, the author was subjected to an internal attack that sought simply to deny a forum to an expressly military point of view, without specific reference to the merits of any particular commentary. Other military writers of the author's acquaintance were forced into other fields because of a virtually universal refusal of editors and publishers of large-circulation magazines to consider any copy that was not highly sensational, preferably of an "expose" nature.

Braestrup acknowledged in a Public Broadcasting Service interview with William Buckley that the public had been denied the choice of an essentially military course of action throughout the Viet Nam War because of pre-

conceptions by the press. Critics of the war gained unlimited coverage by increasingly violent methods, beginning with "teach-ins" in an emotional atmosphere that excluded balanced debate and proceeding to occupation of buildings, assaults on individuals and the burning of buildings. The press tended to accept as the opposite the views of Department of Defense civilian officials. A few newsmen--again confined to the small group of specialists--reported that a third course of action had been proposed by the military, involving mobilization, an invasion of North Viet Nam and in general a more rapid and more massive use of force earlier in the US phase of the war. This view, however, was both suppressed by the Government officials advocating the prevailing "gradualist" strategy and lost on the greater part of the press which tended to present the views of the Secretary of Defense as the "Pentagon," i.e., military viewpoint. The predelictions and the biases, already evident, in the 1950's and 1960's certainly created an atmosphere leading to the more extreme emotionalism that became evident as the war progressed, particularly within The New York Times, as described by Baldwin, and within NBC and CBS, as described by Epstein and Lefever.

Bias, more often than not, is a product of ignorance. That was not true in the case of The Times, where informed judgment and analysis was available but was gradually excluded from consideration. It was truer of NBC and CBS where there were no trained specialists available to provide a balance. It is a danger whenever a news-gathering organization embarks on what journalists once called a "crusade." The New York Times coverage of the abortion issue is in this category and the results in distorted or "buried" news are, if anything, even more evident than was the case with The Times' increasingly emotional criticism of US policy in Viet Nam.

Development of specialized news staffs to cover military affairs and other complex issues will provide a strong corrective to the continuing bias evident in the US press, but only informed and vigorous public criticism can provide the true balancer.

The recording here of the weaknesses and inadequacies of Viet Nam War reporting should not be construed as an "attack" on the press. The author is convinced that the valid, independent judgment of the press is essential to the effective functioning of the US armed forces and of the US Government overall. For the reasons stated, Government censorship is not an acceptable alternative to more effective press coverage. There is, however, a very real danger that if the present inadequacies of the press in virtually every field but sports writing are permitted to continue the rights of the press in some future crisis will be seriously curtailed. Forced to choose between the safety of the country and the unlimited exercise of press freedom the public will most certainly choose to restrict the press.

The decision of the US Supreme Court on May 31, 1978 (Zurcher v. Stanford Daily, No. 76-1484) to permit court-approved search of newspaper offices without prior notice casts a warning shadow. The case was related directly to the excesses of student newspapers during the prior decade. Continuation of an "adversary" attitude by the press toward national defense, with the high degree of emotionalism that term conveys, could lead to further such decisions.

The term applied to the earlier generation of military journalists was "military critic." A critical, rather than an adversary relationship connotes an emphasis on rational analysis rather than emotionalism, and

it implies a necessary degree of technical knowledge on the part of the journalist. It is much easier, and cheaper, to be an "adversary" in the short term, but the long-term prospects are ominous.

#### ADDENDUM

On 19 April 1979, The New York Times quoted Roone Arledge, president of ABC News, as follows in regard to Herbert v. Lando (US Supreme Court No. 77-1105), "The Herbert decision appears to be yet another setback for reporters and First Amendment rights. It is one of a series of recent decisions affecting the press, and although there were conflicting rights involved in almost every one of those cases, the fact that nearly all of them have been cited against the press is ominous."



END NOTES

1. Keyes Beech, "Some Observations on Vietnam," prepared for presentation at a US Army War College faculty seminar on military-press relations, 26 April 1978, and published here as Appendix A.
2. William C. Westmoreland, A Soldier Reports, Doubleday, 1976, p. 420.
3. James Reston, "The End of the Tunnel," The New York Times, April 30, 1975, Op. Ed. Page. Reprinted with permission.
4. Quoted by Edward J. Epstein, News From Nowhere, p. 9.
5. John Hohenberg, Foreign Correspondence: The Great Reporters and Their Times; Phillip Knightley, The First Casualty.
6. John Hohenberg, Foreign Correspondence, p. 49.
7. Phillip Knightley, The First Casualty, p. 23.
8. Ibid., pp. 315-16.
9. Ibid., p. 324. (Quoted from B. Oldfield, Never A Shot in Anger, p. 172).
10. Hanson W. Baldwin in a letter to the author, March 2, 1978.
11. This assessment is based on the extensive discussion of the subject that appeared in Army, The Marine Corps Gazette and other professional publications during the latter 1950's and early 1960's and on observations by the author as a working newsman covering the Department of Defense.
12. John Mecklin, public affairs officer of the US Embassy in Saigon during this period stated that, "No responsible U.S. official in Saigon ever told a newsmen a really big falsehood, instead there were endless little lies." (Quoted by Peter Braestrup, Big Story, p. 3, from Mecklin's Mission in Torment).
13. Vincent Davis, International Studies Association, University of Denver, in letter to Hanson W. Baldwin, January 14, 1966 (Box 4, folder 184, Baldwin papers, Yale University). Davis attributed the quotation to Vann when he spoke with him in October 1965. Mecklin's role is described in his book, Mission in Torment. A memorandum prepared by Mecklin had a major impact in turning at least some influential White House and State Department officials against Diem.
14. David Halberstam, Making of a Quagmire, p. 171.

15. For Harkins' ability to recognize Vann's handiwork, see Ibid., p. 174.

16. For Mecklin's description of the process by which this came about, see his Mission in Torment.

17. John Mecklin, Mission in Torment, p. xii.

18. Box 11, Baldwin papers, Yale University. Braestrup claims no prescience in this. In a letter to the author (March 23, 1978), Braestrup says that he was, in fact, doing nothing more than "asking Hanson to give Halberstam, a friend, a friendly expert's critique. . . I was not upset by [Halberstam's coverage]. I hadn't been reading every word of it. I recall thinking that if Diem was ousted, all would be better in South Vietnam."

19. Our Vietnam Nightmare. "Saigon Summary," America, January 4, 1964, pp. 18-21; "Ugly Americans of Vietnam," America, October 3, 1964, pp. 376-382.

20. See the Beech dispatch copied by Higgins, Our Vietnam Nightmare, pp. 120-21, and the general content of Jim G. Lucas' Dateline Vietnam.

21. In the 18th paragraph of an article by Lewis M. Simons, "South Vietnam Today: A Harsh Life," The Washington Post, August 1, 1977, Mr. Simons reports that, "One diplomat whose government maintains an embassy in Hanoi said he had seen only one [emphasis added] confirmed report of six nuns and three monks burning themselves to death last year in Cantho, a city in the Mekong Delta." The vivid reports of fewer than nine suicides had been sufficient, in 1962-63, to convulse US policy and to bring down President Diem. There was no wire service "pickup" of the Simons report and no mention of the nine suicides on US television. The New York Times which had given page 1 coverage to all the Diem-era suicides, chose to ignore the Simons report. On December 14, 1978, on page B12, of a section called "Metropolitan Report", The New York Times reported, via AP, that a court in "Ho Chi Minh City" had sentenced six leading Buddhist monks to terms of from two to six years in prison for agitating against military conscription. The Associated Press identified the monks as part of "the former Unified Buddhist Association" which, it said, once had "millions" of followers. No editorial comment was made.

22. Neil Sheehan to Hanson W. Baldwin, September 14, 1966, Box 11, folder 578, Baldwin papers, Yale University.

23. Hanson W. Baldwin in a conversation with the author, Carlisle Barracks, PA., June, 1976.

24. Hanson W. Baldwin to Lester Markel, May 24, 1963, Box 11, folder 570, Baldwin papers, Yale University.

25. Hanson W. Baldwin to John B. Oakes, Memoranda of May 15, 1963; April 17, 1964; December 11, 1964; Box 11, folder 573, Baldwin papers, Yale University.

26. Hanson W. Baldwin in a letter to the author, November 1977; repeated in a conversation with the author, Roxbury, Conn., December 10, 1977.

27. Hanson W. Baldwin in a conversation with the author, Roxbury, Conn., December 10, 1977.

28. Hanson W. Baldwin in a letter to the author, May 4, 1978. In a letter to the author dated May 4, 1978, Max Frankel, successor to John B. Oakes as Editorial Page Editor, stated, "Times editorials since Hanson Baldwin retired in the area of defense issues have been written by Robert Kleiman, Richard Ullman and myself as well as, I assume, John Oakes. . ."

29. Hanson W. Baldwin in a letter to the author, March 2, 1978.

30. Hanson W. Baldwin to Clifton Daniel, December 27, 1966, Box 11, folder 558, Baldwin papers, Yale University.

31. Clifton Daniel to Hanson W. Baldwin, December 28, 1966, Box 11, folder 558, Baldwin papers, Yale University.

32. Clifton Daniel to Claude F. Sitton, January 26, 1967, Box 11, Baldwin papers, Yale University.

33. Peter Braestrup in conversation with the author, Wormleysburg, Pa., May 1977.

34. For a detailed account of the story and its impact see Peter Braestrup, Big Story, Chapter 12.

35. Time, May 15, 1978, p. 87.

36. Dale Minor, The Information War, Hawthorne, 1970, pp. 152-153.

37. Ibid., p. 155.

38. May 12, 1970, p. 11.

39. "C.B.S. President Backs War News," The New York Times, January 29, 1966, p. 55.

40. December 7, 1965, p. 14.

41. Peter Braestrup, Big Story, p. 11, based on MACV Weekly Report, January 19, 1968.

42. Phillip Knightley, The First Casualty, p. 419.

43. Various conversations, 1975-1978, with Major General Winant Sidle, Military Assistance Command Viet Nam Information Officer, 1967-1969, and Colonel Alfred J. Mock, US Army Viet Nam Information Officer, 1970-1971.

44. The most elaborately articulated statement of the "independent judgment" philosophy is that of Clifton Daniel, then managing editor of The New York Times before the World Press Institute at St. Paul, Minn., on June 1, 1966, dealing with coverage of the 1961 invasion of Cuba (Bay of Pigs) under Central Intelligence Agency sponsorship. Excerpts from the Daniel speech were published in The Times of June 2, 1966 (p. 14).

45. General Sidle says he encountered "two or three" holding such a view among the major journalists covering the war.

46. The specific proposals and considerations are discussed in greater detail in a draft ms. on US Government press policy in Viet Nam in preparation by Dr. William M. Hammond of the Center for Military History, Department of the Army.

47. Don Oberdorfer, Tet., pp. 331-332.

48. Roscoe Drummond, "Who Killed Credibility," The Harrisburg, (Pa.) Evening News, November 12, 1971.

49. "Tet Coverage: A Debate Renewed" Columbia Journalism Review, January-February 1978, pp. 44-47.

50. "Media: Fallibility and the Fourth Estate," Esquire, February 1978, p. 8.

51. "Journalism Group Names Sigma Delta Chi Winners," The New York Times, April 4, 1978, p. 22.

52. Chapter 14.

53. Peter Braestrup in discussions with the author, Carlisle Barracks, PA., May 1977.

54. "7 Weeks Later, Israelis Debate. Benefits and Losses from the Invasion of Lebanon." by William E. Farrell, The New York Times, May 7, 1968, p. 3.

55. For a description of journalistic embarrassment over these aspects of the Viet Nam press situation, see Michael Herr's Dispatches, Knopf, 1977 (excerpted in the Columbia Journalism Review, January-February 1978, pp. 47-48).

## SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

### BOOKS

- Beech, Keyes. Not Without the Americans, A Personal History, Doubleday, Garden City, N.Y., 1971.
- Braestrup, Peter. Big Story, Westview, Boulder, Colo., 1977, Two Volumes.
- Callaway, Lukel., Jr., LTC. News Coverage of the Cambodian Incursion, US Army War College, 10 March 1972.
- Epstein, Edward Jay. News From Nowhere, Random House, Inc., New York, 1973.
- Funderburk, Raymond E. News Coverage in Vietnam: An Analysis of the Barriers in the News-Gathering Process, Unpublished MA (J) thesis, Department of Journalism, Graduate School of the University of Ala., 1970.
- Goodnow, et. al. News Coverage of the Tet Offensive, US Army War College Student Research Project, 1969.
- Halberstam, David. The Making of a Quagmire, New York, Random House, 1965.
- Higgins, Marguerite. Our Vietnam Nightmare, New York, Harper and Row, 1965.
- Hohenberg, John. Foreign Correspondence: The Great Reporters and Their Times, Columbia University Press, New York, 1964.
- Hulteng, John L. The Messenger's Motives, Prentice Hall, Inc., Englewood Cliffs, N.J.
- Knightley, Phillip. The First Casualty: From the Crimea to Vietnam: The War Correspondent as Hero, Propagandist, and Myth-Maker, Harcourt, Brace, New York, 1975.
- Lefever, Ernest W. TV and National Defense: An Analysis of CBS News, 1972-1973, The Institute for American Strategy, Boston, Ma., 1974.
- Mecklin, John. Mission in Torment, Doubleday, Garden City, N.Y., 1965.
- Oberdorfer, Don. TET, Doubleday, Garden City, 1971.

#### ARTICLES

Baldwin, Hanson. "The Information War in Saigon," The Reporter, February 1966, pp. 29-31.

Higgins, Marguerite, "Saigon Summary," America, January 4, 1964, pp. 18-21.

Higgins, Marguerite. "Ugly Americans of Vietnam," America, October 3, 1964, pp. 376-382.

Marshall, S. L. A. "The Worst Reported War," The Virginian Pilot, November 1, 1970, p. 5.

Marshall, S. L. A. "The Press Failure in Vietnam," The New Leader, October 10, 1966.

Roberts, Gene. "Ground Rules Keep Tight Rein on War Reporting," The New York Times, July 2, 1968, p. 6.

APPENDIX A  
SOME OBSERVATIONS ON VIETNAM

by  
KEYES BEECH\*

I think some general observations are in order before getting down to a detailed discussion of this very complicated subject.

One is that each man is the sum total of his experience at a particular place in time. I was a Marine combat correspondent in the Pacific during World War II. I covered the Korean war. I covered the French collapse in Indo-China.

In short, I already knew that war was hell before I set up shop in Saigon to cover what someone accurately described--so far as the U.S. was concerned--as the "American war in Asia."

Some of my young colleagues like Neil Sheehan here were finding out for the first time that war was hell. Naturally, we reacted differently. If I had been Sheehan's age, not long out of Harvard and with my very own war to cover, I probably would have reacted as he did. But I was pushing 50 and he wasn't yet 30, so we went our different ways.

I mention this because I think it is important to an understanding of the bitterness that existed between the press and in the military in Vietnam and within the press corps itself. To a very large extent, the Americans in Vietnam were a reflection of American society in the 60's. There was a generation gap in Vietnam as well as the U.S.

---

\*Copyright 1978 by Keyes Beech. Reprinted with permission.

The generals who were in charge of the war were crewcut products of World War II. With the exception of some middle-aged Rover Boys like myself, the reporters were young enough to be their sons. Worse yet, they wore their hair long and they landed in Vietnam, most of them, with the firmly held conviction that the war was an abomination. As one of them was to remark to me later, "I don't give a good goddam about your generation. All I want is to get my generation out of here."

That was laying it on the line.

If there is one thing that everyone can agree on about Vietnam, it was that it was a lousy war. But was it an unwinnable war? I bring up the question now because it has become the fashion to dismiss our defeat in Vietnam on the ground that the war was unwinnable in the first place.

The South Vietnamese were too lazy, too corrupt and not worth fighting for in the first place. Or so it was said, and a good argument could be made for that case, even though the number of "boat people" still fleeing Vietnam three years after the war seems to indicate they preferred what they had to what they have.

But that is different from saying the war was unwinnable. I never believed it was unwinnable and I still don't. It is not the purpose of this seminar to refight the Vietnam war, but it is relevant to this discussion because it became doctrine in some circles, especially in the liberal press corps, that the war couldn't be won and, even if it could be, it shouldn't because it would somehow be immoral to win.

Personally, I have always preferred winning to losing. In any event, it was clear from the start, in my view, that we had the power to win the war if we had chosen to use it as early as 1965, which is the year when we should have gone all out or got out.



We did neither. Instead, we followed a policy of "gradualism." Our problem was that we were fighting a limited, which is to say defensive, war, to preserve the territorial integrity of South Vietnam. But the real enemy was in North Vietnam.

So, we gradually increased the pressure on the north, extending the bombing farther and farther north, each time giving Hanoi advance notice of our intentions, each time giving them plenty of time to prepare for the next extension. All this we did out of a desire to limit the war, to limit the death and destruction. Our goal was not the defeat of North Vietnam, merely the preservation of South Vietnam.

The object in any war, as I see it, is to get it over in the shortest possible time with minimum loss of life to both sides. Because we lacked the requisite ruthlessness, because we couldn't make up our minds, because we were afraid of what people would say, we strung the Vietnam war out for 12 long years until the Communists mercifully ended it. We not only prolonged the suffering, the death and destruction which we sought to avoid, we also lost the war.

We lost 56,000 American lives, the South Vietnamese about two million and the North Vietnamese perhaps twice that many. In war, perhaps ruthlessness is the better part of compassion. U.S. Navy Captain Wayne P. Hughes, Jr., writing in the July 1977 issue of the United States Naval Institute Proceedings, summed up our reward: "How perverse--how utterly perverse--that the nation that tried harder than any in recorded history to fight with forbearance was and is impugned as few nations have been for fighting an inhumane war."

Vietnam will be remembered for My Lai. But nobody cares, if indeed they ever knew, that the North Vietnamese executed approximately 3,000 civilians during the Tet Offensive at Hue. I suppose the explanation is that what the Vietnamese did to each other didn't count but what the Americans did to the Vietnamese did count.

Many years ago, before Vietnam, in Tokyo, I was invited to take part in a seminar something like this. A very earnest young PIO--they called them public information officers in those days--asked me what I thought was the proper relationship between reporters and PIO's.

"Mutual distrust," I replied, off the top of my head. It was a flip answer to a serious question. But the more I thought about it, the sounder it seemed to me.

Reporters are in the telling business. By the very nature of their trade, information officers are often in the non-telling business. I see nothing especially wrong with this.

It is the natural order of things. An information officer is supposed to disseminate information--but he does so only at the will of his commanding officer. And I don't need to tell you that if he doesn't please his commanding officer, he doesn't last long. All this is obvious and to be accepted as part of the human condition.

I never could understand why some of my colleagues got so upset in Vietnam when the military occasionally lied to them. What the hell did they expect? It was part of the game. But when I made that remark in Tokyo about the proper relationship between reporter and PIO being one of mutual distrust, I was speaking in semi-jest. I never dreamed of the mutual hatred and suspicion that existed between the press and the military in Vietnam--with due allowance for exception.

Personally, I felt caught in the middle. On the one hand, I found myself in the awkward position of being on the side of the Establishment in that I believed in the objective if not the way we were going about achieving it. On the other, I was often disgusted with what I considered the boorish behavior of some members of the press corps, not to mention what I felt to be their irresponsibility.

One of the things that most irritated me was what happened at some of the background briefings, especially in the early days of the war. Too often the guest of honor, who might have been the ambassador or the senior ranking general, never got to say anything because the correspondents were too busy quarreling among themselves. I knew what the correspondents thought. What I wanted to know was what the ambassador thought. After all, that is what he was there for.

Professionally, my greatest problem in covering Vietnam was keeping my equilibrium. We tended to view the war from peaks of euphoria or valleys of despair. We could be winning on Monday and losing on Thursday.

What was lacking throughout the war was a sense of direction, of coherence, of perspective, of what we were about. We are constantly asking ourselves, "What are the lessons of Vietnam?"

One answer might be, "Never get into a war unless you intend to win it." Another might be that any war that is worth fighting is worth winning. But the chief strategic lesson of Vietnam, in my opinion, is summed up in these words: Keep it short. Americans have no stomach for long wars.

North Vietnam's Prime Minister Phan Van Dong knew this if the Americans didn't. Early in the 60's he told an interviewer that this

was going to be a long, inconclusive war, that the Americans did not like long, inconclusive wars, and that therefore his side would win in the end.

How very right he was.

Late in 1965 I had Hanoi's strategy spelled out to me by a Canadian diplomat, Blair Seaborn, chief of the Canadian delegation to the International Control Commission, as he sat on a packing case in his home in Saigon. He was packing up to go back to Ottawa.

Seaborn, although I wasn't aware of it at the time, was our secret contact with Hanoi. He had just returned from the north and what he had to say was this:

Since Hanoi regarded him as an "American puppet," he decided he might as well be a useful puppet. Because no one of consequence in the Hanoi government would see him, he used East European diplomats as intermediaries. His message was this: The U.S. was very powerful, had many awesome weapons, many troops and great determination. Therefore, Hanoi would be well advised to stop its war of aggression against the south.

The reply was interesting: Yes, the Hanoi leadership was well aware of American power and military technology. The French had been very powerful and they had a lot of big guns. But the Vietminh had persevered and they had won. As for the Americans, it was true that they were very powerful and that North Vietnam would take many casualties. But the American elections were only three years away, Hanoi would hang on, and by that time the Americans would be so fed up with the war that they would be ready to quit, not in defeat but in disgust.

How very right they were.

I wrote the story as Seaborn told it to me--but without attribution.

It was a very important and prophetic story, much more so than I realized at the time. Happily, my paper gave it a good play. Mike Mansfield, who was passing through Saigon about that time, thought Hanoi's strategy made a great deal of sense. So did Henry Cabot Lodge, who passed the story on to the White House, which soon began to leak what it called Hanoi's new strategy.

I wish I could be as pleased with other stories I wrote from Vietnam. I am not.

In fact, I don't know of a single conscientious correspondent who could honestly say he was happy with what he did there. But the same thing could be said of a good many generals, diplomats and others who made up that sprawling thing that was called the American presence.

I once asked Alex Johnson if, when he was deputy ambassador to Saigon, he ever expected for us to commit more than a half million troops to Vietnam. "Good God, no!" he exclaimed. Then, as an afterthought, he said: "You know, I feel a little guilty that I didn't foresee that."

There were a lot of things we should have foreseen.

In their bitterness, some military men have blamed the media for losing the war. That, of course, is nonsense. But there is little doubt, at least in my mind, that the media--and in this context I am referring specifically to television because of its impact--did hasten our withdrawal from Vietnam by undermining whatever support there was at home for that war.

If our military men and diplomats have a good deal to answer for, so does the American media. The sins and distortions of television in reporting Vietnam have been so well documented that they need no repetition

here. And if I single out television over the printed media, it is only because TV had had the greater impact.

In 1967, when I went to see Secretary of State Dean Rusk in Washington, he remarked rather cryptically that, "Well, it had to happen some day."

"What?" I asked.

"Yesterday, down in Georgia, a mother saw her son killed on TV," he said.

Two of my colleagues, Peter Braestrup in Big Story and Don Oberdorfer in Tet!, have documented the sins of the media with accuracy and precision. Both are excellent books. I would add only a footnote as a refresher.

Earlier this month, on April 12, there was a retrospective showing of TV film of the Tet Offensive at the National Archives auditorium of the Smithsonian. Among the panelists were some Vietnam TV veterans who were seeing some of their Tet film for the first time. One of them was Ron Nessen, who served as an NBC correspondent in Vietnam before he became President Ford's press secretary. After the showing, Nessen had this to say:

"With the wonderful benefit of hindsight, I'm appalled at how little we knew and how much we pretended to know. My reports from Khe Sanh are embarrassing to look at now. We had no idea what the strategy or tactics were. . . we have a compulsion to draw from 'isolated skirmishes in nameless jungles' some sweeping conclusions."

Nessen was being honest. But was the fault all his? Didn't the army have an obligation to brief him and other correspondents on the strategy and tactics? Or was the situation too far gone for that?

In conclusion, I have very little fault to find with Mr. Kennedy's

draft paper, except for emphasis here and there. But he asks some difficult questions which we can take up in the general discussion.

## APPENDIX B

### RECOLLECTIONS OF AP BAC

by

LIEUTENANT COLONEL ANDREW P. O'MEARA, JR., U.S.A.

My observations of Ap Bac are a product of the mission of my unit. I was the advisor of the 5th Troop (Mechanized Infantry Company), 1st Army of the Republic of Viet Nam (ARVN) Cavalry Regiment, stationed at Go Vap. I had helped form and train the troops during the period September to December 1962. Our first significant combat operations were conducted at Loc Ninh, Song Be and Don Xaoi during December 1962 and January 1963. My unit was returning from operations in the vicinity of Rang Rang, when the battle of Ap Bac began. We were marching through Saigon, time approximately 2400 hours, on our way to Go Vap, when we received a radio message to proceed directly to Tan An and report to the commanding general, 7th ARVN Division, at which time we would be assigned to his operational control. We arrived early in the morning of the second day of the battle and were committed as a reserve to a blocking position.

The battle had been initiated as a result of a rather ambitious tactical operation that saw a link-up between air-mobile and mechanized troops. Intelligence indicated an unidentified Viet Cong (VC) unit of unknown strength operating in the area. The air mobile assault was inserted. The troops found themselves on a hot landing zone. The link-up was unsuccessful. Heavy losses were sustained in the air mobile assault, several H21's were lost and a great many casualties were sustained, as I recall.



The Mechanized troop (commanded by Captain Ba) attempted to assault the village of Ap Bac. They encountered a formidable canal and tree line on the opposite side of the canal. The unit was unable to cross the canal inasmuch as the banks were too steep. The M113's were halted approximately 100 meters from the canal. The 50 caliber gunners engaged VC firing positions in the woodline. The VC returned fire with mortar fire, a 57 recoilless rifle and rifle fire.

The fire of the VC was highly effective destroying a number of vehicles and killing all of the 50 caliber gunners. The VC fighting positions were well dug in and camouflaged in the canal bank and wood line. Supporting air strikes hit in the center of mass of the village, and inflicted little damage on the firing positions along the canal and tree line. The Mechanized troop attempted a dismounted assault that was ineffective. Those troops not killed as they dismounted were pinned down.

The next phase of the battle was seen as an envelopment and encirclement of the VC unit by the Division Senior Advisor (Lieutenant Colonel John Paul Vann). A battalion of the Air Borne Brigade made a jump to encircle, according to the Americans. However, it landed on top of the cut up ARVN troops, serving to strengthen the ARVN and allowing the VC to withdraw. Lt. Col. Vann protested violently and committed the cooks, clerks, and drivers of the advisory team at My Tho to the originally intended blocking position. My unit arrived early the next morning, we were briefed and proceeded to the vicinity of the position the American Advisory Team occupied the night before. We soon discovered that the battle was over. The VC had slipped away during the night. My counterpart

and I walked over the battlefield, examined the burned out tracks, the result of the air strikes and the remains of the VC dead that had not been policed up.

The VC were armed with the MAS 36, a number of unidentified automatic weapons, the mortars and the recoilless rifle. We observed several shattered MAS 46's among the dead. The VC were well led and appeared to enjoy good intelligence. Their well sited, camouflaged, and deep fighting positions permitted them to withstand the direct fire of the M113's, as much of the artillery, and almost all of the poorly directed air effort (B-26's). The ARVN intelligence was provided by the Americans and was based upon radio intercept.

The ARVN tactical employment of the Mechanized unit, CPT Ba's company, was initially quite aggressive. Once they recognized that they were faced by a serious obstacle covered by fire they initially laid down a base of fire and attempted to assault. The marksmanship of the VC riflemen was excellent. Most of the ARVN 50 caliber gunners died of head wounds within the opening minutes of the fight. In some cases, two or three men had died in succession at those guns.

Lt. Col. Vann spilled his gut to the press on this occasion. As I walked up to the small group of tents that constituted the Division Command Post, at Tan An, I observed Lt. Col. Vann talking to Halberstam of The New York Times. They were standing in full view and within hearing of the Headquarters, Vann was red in the face and loudly denouncing the ARVN for cowardice and incompetence.

## APPENDIX C

27 March 1968

Subj: Interpretation of Ground Rules

1. A MACOI memorandum to the press of 29 January 1968 reminded all press members of the ground rules involving ground combat to which they agreed when they were accredited by MAVC. A follow-up memorandum of 26 February further explained one of the rules.
2. Members of the press have been most cooperative in attempting to stem the flow of important intelligence information to the enemy. However based both on logic and the many queries received from newsmen it is obvious that no set of ground rules can cover every tactical situation encountered by newsmen in the field. Although relatively few in number, "gray areas" cannot be eliminated.
3. To assist newsmen in correctly interpreting any ground rule gray areas, MACV will provide 24-hour service to anyone who obtains information which he feels is subject to interpretation under the ground rules. Any newsman in the I CTZ who is concerned about the intelligence value of material he wishes to use in a story should contact the ISO at the MACV Press Center, Danang: phone Danang 6259. Elsewhere in Vietnam, queries should be addressed to MACV extensions 3163 or 3989 where someone able to make a decision will always be on duty.
4. We hope that this service will help ensure a maximum flow of information which insuring the necessary protection to our troops.
5. For your information, a copy of the key ground rules is attached.

**Signed**

WINANT SIDLE  
Brigadier General, USA  
Chief of Information

1 INCL  
as

27 March 1968

Excerpts from "Rules Governing Public Release of Military Information"  
(31 Oct 1966 & 29 March 1967)

The following information is not releasable, unless and until released by MACV.

1. Future plans, operations, or strikes.
2. Information on or confirmation of Rules of Engagement.
3. Amounts of ordnance and fuel moved by support units or on hand in combat units (ordnance includes weapons or weapons systems).
4. During an operation, unit designations and troop movements, tactical deployments, name of operation and size of friendly forces involved.
5. Intelligence unit activities, methods of operation, or specific locations.
6. Exact number and type of casualties or damage suffered by friendly units.
7. Number of sorties and the amount of ordnance expended on strikes outside of RVN.
8. Information on aircraft taking off for strikes, enroute to, or returning from target area. Information on strikes while they are in progress.
9. Identity of units and locations of air bases from which aircraft are launched on combat operations.
10. Number of aircraft damaged or any other indicator of effectiveness or ineffectiveness of ground antiaircraft defenses.
11. Tactical specifics, such as altitudes, course, speeds, or angle of attack. (General descriptions such as "low and fast" may be used.
12. Information on or confirmation of planned strikes which do not take place for any reason, including bad weather.
13. Specific identification of enemy weapons systems utilized to down friendly aircraft.
14. Details concerning downed aircraft while SAR operations are in progress.
15. Aerial photos of fixed installations.

-END-

## DISTRIBUTION

### EXTERNAL

ODCSOPS, DA	25
USMA	5
USACGSC	10
Armor School	1
Infantry School	1
Artillery School	1
Defense Information School	10

### INTERNAL

DAA	1
DNISS	1
DCMGT	1
DMSP0	1
DCS	1
AWC Library	1
SSI	50

### SPECIAL DISTRIBUTION

99

UNCLASSIFIED

SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE (When Data Entered)

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE		READ INSTRUCTIONS BEFORE COMPLETING FORM
1. REPORT NUMBER ACN 77002	2. GOVT ACCESSION NO.	3. RECIPIENT'S CATALOG NUMBER
4. TITLE (and Subtitle) Press Coverage of the Vietnam War: The Third View		5. TYPE OF REPORT & PERIOD COVERED Draft report of the study group.
		6. PERFORMING ORG. REPORT NUMBER
7. AUTHOR(s) Mr. William V. Kennedy		8. CONTRACT OR GRANT NUMBER(s)
9. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME AND ADDRESS Strategic Studies Institute US Army War College Carlisle Barracks, PA 17013		10. PROGRAM ELEMENT, PROJECT, TASK AREA & WORK UNIT NUMBERS
11. CONTROLLING OFFICE NAME AND ADDRESS		12. REPORT DATE 25 May 1979
		13. NUMBER OF PAGES 108
14. MONITORING AGENCY NAME & ADDRESS (if different from Controlling Office)		15. SECURITY CLASS. (of this report)  UNCLASSIFIED
		15a. DECLASSIFICATION/DOWNGRADING SCHEDULE
16. DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT (of this Report) Approved for public release; distribution unlimited.		
17. DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT (of the abstract entered in Block 20, if different from Report)		
18. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES		
19. KEY WORDS (Continue on reverse side if necessary and identify by block number) Press; Media; Viet Nam; Baldwin, Hanson W.,; New York <u>Times</u> .		
20. ABSTRACT (Continue on reverse side if necessary and identify by block number) The debate over press coverage of the Viet Nam War generally is polarized as "pro" or "anti" press. Lost in this dispute is the fact that a third group consisting of journalists criticized press coverage of the war on grounds of technical and professional competence. They supply convincing evidence that the war was misreported and that the same thing will happen again unless there are basic institutional changes. The study proposes the adoption by each news gathering agency of specialized military coverage on		

UNCLASSIFIED

SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE(When Data Entered)

the model of that which existed at The New York Times during the tenure of Hanson W. Baldwin as military editor. Mr. Baldwin's latter day conflicts within the Times, and with Secretary of Defense R. S. McNamara are documented from Mr. Baldwin's papers at Yale University, supplemented by interviews and correspondence.

UNCLASSIFIED

SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE(When Data Entered)